FANTASY ART EXHIBITION

THE BEST DIGITAL ART FROM AROUND THE GLOBE VOLUME TWO

FRANK FRAZETTA 80TH BIRTHDAY
LIMITED EDITION PRINT

Tarzan at the Earth's Core
Frank Frazetta, 1963

This painting was originally done in 1963 as the cover for the Ace Books edition of Tarzan at the Earth's Core by Edgar Rice Burroughs. "This was an attempt at pure painting, but still keeping [J. Allen] St. John very much in mind," Frazetta remembered in a 1999 interview. "I had painted this originally on a cheap piece of illustration board—I was notoriously chintzy with art supplies — and the board started to warp right before my eyes. I tried to straighten it out and it cracked in half. It was such a simple piece that it was faster to repaint it rather than try to repair it. I gave the one that was broken in half to [noted Burroughs fan] Vern Corriell — I think he just stuck the two pieces in a frame and hung it on the wall." This painting has been digitally restored for its inclusion here; changes between it and the second published version can be found on page 53 of Legacy: Selected Paintings & Drawings by the Grand Master of Fantastic Art, Frank Frazetta, published by Underwood Books.
– Arnie Fenner, 2008

Welcome...

Welcome to volume two of Fantasy Art Exhibition. Our first collection last year showcasing some of the very best artwork from ImagineFX magazine was a smash hit (and is sold out – sorry!). So over the following 224 pages, you'll meet some more of the world's most talented amateur and professional digital artists. Browse their portfolios in our FXPosé galleries, learn their techniques in our Master of Art workshops, and delve into the minds of some of the true visionaries of fantasy art in our Legend interviews.

I'm proud that ImagineFX continues to be able to showcase such outstanding talent every month, and delighted to present this celebration of inspiring art from around the world.

Rob Carney
Editor, ImagineFX

FANTASY & SCI-FI DIGITAL ART
ImagineFX Contents

Europe

Rest of the world

Reader FXPosé

Ado Ceric
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SOFTWARE: Photoshop CS2

Ado was born in Croatia, 31 years ago... "And the sleepy, calm and serene beauty of my small home town has left its mark upon me for my whole life," he says. It was the forest that did it: "I was endlessly fascinated by that old forest and the mysterious secrets hidden in it."

Even as a child Ado was tempted to draw celestial creatures, which he believed to be hidden into the depths of the woods. "I enjoyed drawing creatures and old trees," he says, "and from there I started to enjoy art more and more."

Until recently this meant traditional materials and techniques. Then, three years ago, Ado discovered digital media. "My horizons expanded." Even now, though, he tries to maintain that sense of child-like fascination with the world: "I try to find beauty that is hidden around us. I think that's very important for me."

1 ROGUE A cyber-punk rogue from a Blade Runner-esque future.

2 PLAGUE SISTERS These two charming sisters cause plague across the land "by using their minions: plague worms."
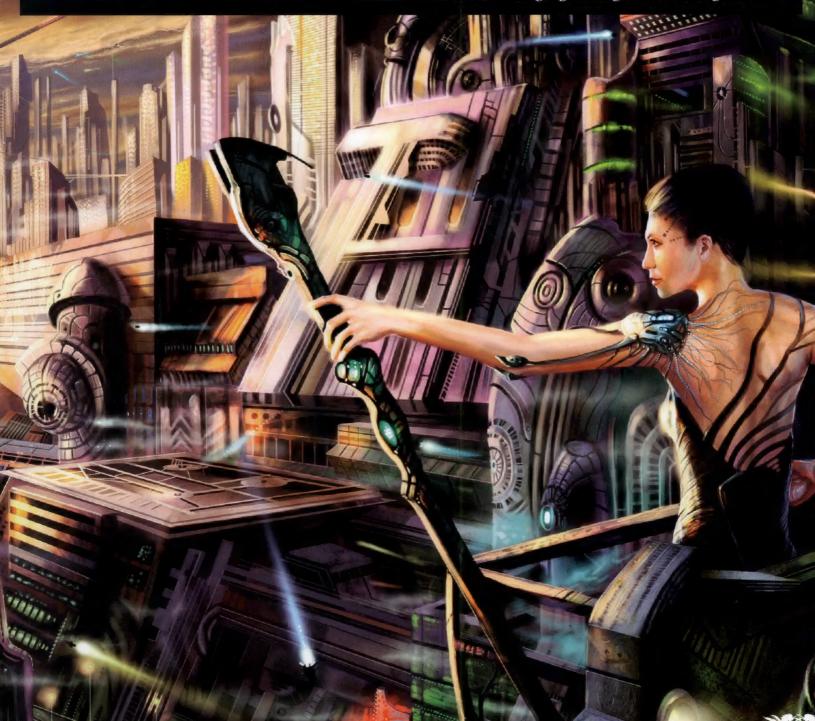
Artist crit
EA's Philip Straub gives his opinion

"Fantasy cityscapes are always a favourite subject of mine, so when I first saw Ado's image, Rogue, I was very impressed with the overall execution. There is a solid sense of scale and action in the piece along with a consistent design language throughout. Overall, great work!"

Reader FXPosé
THE PLACE TO SHARE YOUR DIGITAL ART

🇺🇸 David Hillman
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SOFTWARE: Photoshop 7, Illustrator 10, and Painter IX

"I picked up a pencil at the age of six and nobody had the good sense to stop me." That's how David attempts to explain his continuing adventures with art.

"I started out wanting to draw comic books," he says. "But as I got older I discovered that the field of illustration was much wider." So much so that today, David is a man of many hats: "I've done everything from comics and toy design, to licensing art and currently storyboards for film, TV and music videos," he says.

Starting out as a traditional illustrator, David was dragged into the digital age kicking and screaming, but quickly fell for the wide-open possibilities available with programs like Photoshop and Painter. "Once I moved up to using a Wacom Cintiq I never looked back. I'm always restless. I'm starting to build a portfolio of concept art for the video games industry."

1 DEJAH THORIS "I love Burroughs," says David, "and heard a Warlord of Mars film was in development, so I decided to come up with designs for consideration."

2 JOHN CARTER OF MARS "Another Warlord of Mars design. Both this picture and Dejah Thoris were created in Painter IX and Photoshop 7 using a Wacom Cintiq, inspired by Gil Kane, J Allen St John and Roy Krenkel."

3 LILE BLU "Based on my character design for Lile Blu, I came up with a sample cut-scene," explains David. This was also his first piece done entirely on the Cintiq.

Reader
EXPosé
THE PLACE TO SHARE YOUR DIGITAL ART

**John Staub
aka Dustsplat**
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SOFTWARE: Photoshop CS2 and Corel Painter IX

"Ever since I was young, I've always been into things that were very visual," says John. Fantasy art was an important example: "I always saw myself getting drawn to those types of images and found myself inspired by the creativity and look."

During high school, John found himself drawing more than ever and in the process getting more serious about his art. He draws mostly manga and anime because that's what excites him. "I also enjoy creating worlds that I would personally be drawn to and would rather be in," he explains.

Digital art is a relatively new thing. "It's easier to apply and express myself, and since the world is turning digital I find myself getting more and more inspired to do these kinds of images."

1 COIN DROP "Imagine a hollow mountain made entirely of houses built on top of each other. And within that hollow cavity is a vast city, and that's what this image is, in a nutshell."

2 RUSTY GUARD "This image is of a female warrior who has a mechanical guardian who carries her sword for her. She just grabs it from his arm whenever she needs it," says John.

🇺🇸 Steve Thomas
LOCATION: US
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SOFTWARE: Photoshop 4

Steve is a graphic artist and illustrator with eight years of digital art experience. "Self-taught, I started painting with acrylics and quickly made the transition to the computer." And although he still paints traditionally from time to time, "digital media offers me the no-mess, easy-to-alter kind of freedom that is hard to ignore for a freelance artist."

Steve's interest in science fiction and fantasy art goes way back: "I've always drawn dragons, spaceships and sword-wielding warriors. As much as I liked creating those images, I equally enjoyed looking at other artists' work."

Inspired first by the book covers of Larry Elmore and Frank Frazetta, "my influences have multiplied exponentially with the introduction of the internet and online portfolios. I can't get enough of this stuff."

1 NOT SO FAST "Half-man, half-spider, all fright." He is the gatekeeper to a domain very few return from.

2 FLIGHTLESS FREAK "Disfigured by alien chemical warfare, this poor soul is doomed to wander the wastelands with wings that don't work and a bulging eye that can only see his death." Poor creature!

🇺🇸 **Jordan Speer**
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SOFTWARE: Photoshop, Bryce 5,
Wings 3D

Jordan started to get into digital art about five years ago when he began experimenting with a free program called Wings 3D. "From there, my interest catapulted, as I discovered the massive community of digital artists and the amazing work that they continue to produce," he says.

As for his chosen subject matter, Jordan always had a penchant for the fantastic and surreal. "I love the idea that the environment around us can be altered, twisted, and transformed into something seemingly impossible."

JRR Tolkien introduced the fantastic, and later Ted Nasmith and Jacek Yerka expanded the horizons.

"I think the digital art community has pushed fantasy and sci-fi art in an awesome new direction," adds Jordan. These ideas are slowly finding ways into the mainstream. "I'm currently trying to expand my knowledge outside of my comfort zone by experimenting with new programs and ideas, while at the same time trying to keep a balance with traditional mediums."

1 THE GATES OF MORDOR "The gates were modelled in Wings 3D, and the scene was set up in Bryce."

2 THE TWO KINGS First in the ongoing 'Annod' series. "Annod is a world in my head that continues to grow; eventually I hope to back up the work with a story," says Jordan.

IFX INSIGHT
"I think The Two Kings is a particularly successful piece. It gives the viewer a sense of a great journey through a grand sense of scale and some clever lighting."
Rob Carney,
Editor, IFX

Don Maitz

There's more to Don Maitz than Captain Morgan, although he does love pirates…

Any fan of sci-fi novels is more than likely to have seen Don Maitz's artwork. In a distinguished career he has illustrated covers for sci-fi greats such as Isaac Asimov, Ray Bradbury, Allan Dean Foster, and Michael Moorcock, and was twice awarded the coveted Hugo award for best professional artist.

Don attended Paier School of Art in Hamden, Connecticut, where he studied a broad range of disciplines, and went on to graduate at the top of his class.

"We drew all day, every day, and if we weren't drawing, we were painting," he explains. "There were hours and hours of figure drawing and painting. I loved it."

With such a broad curriculum on offer, Don's career could have gone in any number of directions. An adept comic artist, Don was encouraged to drop out of art school to draw comics full time, but his passion lay elsewhere. "I found my heart was more into painting than drawing or inking," he says. "I discovered the art of Howard Pyle, Edwin Austin Abbey, Maxfield Parrish, NC Wyeth and of course, Frank Frazetta."

Don openly acknowledges the debt that he owes to the so-called 'father of fantasy art', both in terms of style and of the opportunities that he created for fantasy artists. "At the time I was introduced to the market, Frank Frazetta's covers were selling books and publishers were receptive to artists who could hook a reader's imagination like Frazetta," he says.

The influence of Frazetta is clear in his mind, but the process of editorial illustration is about answering a brief, according to Don. "Even I am asked to paint something specific," he says. "I like to draw directly from the source – the author's written words. I feel better knowing the cover relates directly to the story within."

A PIRATE'S LIFE FOR ME

Despite an illustrious career in book cover illustration, Don's most recognisable works are not his fantasy themed subjects, but his paintings of buccaneers and rogues. In short, he owes his success to painting pirates.

Don was commissioned by distiller Joseph Seagram & Sons back in 1982 to develop the titular character for Captain Morgan's rum (See 'Captain Morgan', page 14), and has had numerous requests since to paint the subject. But his paintings made a leap from fantasy to historical interpretation after the discovery of the wreck of the Whydah, a slave merchant ship that was captured by pirates off the coast of Cape Cod. Don was commissioned by National Geographic magazine to paint a speculative piece portraying the ship being seized by pirate Black Sam Bellamy and his crew. His work was also shown on Dateline NBC for a feature on the wreck.

As esoteric a subject as it may seem, there is in fact a long tradition of painting pirates. The buccaneer was first popularised in Robert Louis Stevenson's Treasure Island,

BLACKBEARD
Don says: "Blackbeard was the most memorable of the pirates that plied their trade in the early 1700s. Here he is shown boarding a ship, appearing as the devil himself."

Artist
PROFILE

Don Maitz

Don Maitz was born in Bristol, Connecticut, in 1953. He has illustrated book covers for sci-fi greats such as Isaac Asimov and Ray Bradbury and has twice been awarded the Hugo award for best professional artist, but he is most famous for his paintings of pirates and in particular the title character for Captain Morgan's rum.
WEB: www.paravia.com/
DonMaitz/Version3/index.html

and it was NC Wyeth's illustrations for that book that first attracted Don to the subject.

"When I lived in Connecticut, I would regularly visit a small art museum just to see the NC Wyeth painting 'One more step, Mr Hands', his classic Treasure Island illustration," he recalls.

"There are stereotypes and human emotions that can be expressed through pirates' iconic symbolism, and they're fun to paint. There is so little actually known about them that they are open to interpretation. Besides," he adds gleefully, "voyaging into the

66 There are stereotypes of emotion that can be expressed through pirates' iconic symbolism 99

SHADY PIRATE
Another pirate on a Caribbean beach, pausing to reflect.

ARTHUR STEPS UP

uncharted unknown, charting one's course, rebelling against social norms, and making up rules as one goes along… it's very similar to creating freelance artwork!"

SOUL MAITZ

Another major influence in Don's life is his wife Janny Wurts, with whom he shares a house and a studio. He's full of admiration for her work: "She has written over 14 published fantasy novels. She provides her own cover paintings, interior illustrations, and maps to her books. She's like a modern-day Howard Pyle!"   ➨

DRAGONS ON THE SEA OF NIGHT
This was created for the cover of the British edition of fantasy novel
Dragons on the Sea of Night by Eric Lustbader. "The image was
inspired by the title and by moody Florida thunder clouds."

CAPTAIN MORGAN
Yo ho ho and a bottle of rum: painting the famous pirate

Don Maitz's most famous creation is that of the Captain, the pirate figure who
~~adorns the labels of Captain Morgan Spiced Rum. Don has been commissioned~~
on six occasions for the job and has produced 14 great paintings of the titular
character in total.

He describes working on the project: "I produced sketches with several
approaches and evolved the character. I did a pen-and-ink drawing for the
label art, and an oil painting for the initial advertising launch. The product
tested well in selected cities and then went national. There was an ad
campaign following that using another artist's portrayal of the Captain on
billboards, but it didn't seem to stick."

The character of Captain Morgan is based on Henry Morgan, a 17th century
Buccaneer, though for one of his most recent paintings depicting the Captain
on the rigging of a ship, Don used his wife Janny Wurts as reference!

KING'S BUCCANEER
This is the cover of a Raymond E Feist novel in which a Buccaneer's lady has been kidnapped and he is in pursuit

"Suspending disbelief with just the right amount of the right information is what it's all about"

WIZARD'S APPROACH
Don says: "I find painting wizards an exciting prospect. Since their abilities are only limited by one's imagination, their presentation provides limitless possibilities.

Don developed his own style through a process of "observation, experimentation, and trial-and-error," and his work exhibits a carefully considered blend of photorealism and painterly expressiveness. He's achieved this effect by working from a range of source material from thumbnail sketches to photographs. For the figures, he often photographs models in various poses and mixes and matches the best elements.

"Suspending disbelief with just the right amount of the right information is what it's all about," he explains. "Not enough reference can result in an image that has shallowness, stiffness and predictable surfaces. Too much and you can get lost in the surface and miss the drama or the point."

Don's broad-based art school training means that while he predominantly paints in oils he can use other media where appropriate. "Sometimes the commissions themselves will dictate the methods used," he says. "If I were doing a particular kind of science fiction painting, I might paint in acrylics instead of my usual oils to add a burst of airbrush to convey a mechanical aspect, although I am no fan of airbrushing. Likewise, watercolour may be the ticket to accomplish the task properly, or digital manipulation."

Don suggests that one of the best ways to learn new techniques is by getting out to galleries and, where possible, seeking out original work. "Unless you do, you can't interpret the paint applications; what is opaque, what is transparent, how the paint layers overlap…" he says. "The blending of colours is there to see as well as the application of materials. Reproductions do not tell the whole story."

DIGITAL WORLD

Don's work has recently attracted the attention of Hollywood and he has found himself working as a concept artist on two recent CG features. Don was contacted by DNA Productions to work on character sketches for the feature-length version of their animation, Jimmy Neutron: Boy Genius. Following that film's success, DNA Productions brought Don in from the outset to work on concept art for their next film, The Ant Bully. Though principally a traditional media artist, it was on this project that Don began to see the benefit of the digital approach.

"While I confessed not to be up to speed in digital rendering, I knew Mac OS X and had a basic grasp of Photoshop," he says. "I was introduced to a roomful of experts with whom I worked on a daily basis. Though I did not know the key commands and sophisticated manipulation of images within the program, I took copious notes and with sustained practice, produced acceptable results within a relatively short time."

Junior McLean

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SOFTWARE: Photoshop CS, Poser 6, Bryce 5, Apophysis 2.05, currently studying 3ds max 8 and LightWave

Junior is originally from the Bronx, NYC area. Ever since he was a youngster he's had a talent for art, and he wants that to rub off: "I hope that what I do will motivate young people to just be creative and stand out."

Working at anime/comic book conventions in NYC for nine years gave Junior a real boost. "It was a huge plus," he says. "I thank the artists, illustrators and celebs I've met and learned to do business as a freelancer."

Once he discovered 3D, Junior began to explore the online communities: "I joined up right away and started learning to better myself." Favourite sites include renderosity.com ("a proud member since 2001"), terranuts.com and deviantart.com.

"I've used the screen names 'SlayerX' or 'LordFreeza' for years," adds Junior. "They stand out."

1 MY ANIME ELF GIRL The background image here was created using Apophysis 2.05 and belongs to another piece: The Final Frontier, "Which I made for my dad." The Figure is Poser 6's Aiko 3, "which I'm going bananas over."

2 MY FIRST ANIME TOY FIGURE "For this piece I combined Poser 6, Apophysis 2.05 and Photoshop CS for the final postwork." The goal was poseable figures for digital desktop wallpapers: "I'm considering selling a few pretty soon."

🇺🇸 **Berin David Uriegas**
LOCATION: US
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EMAIL: berinu @ mac.com
SOFTWARE: Photoshop CS2, Painter

A life-long sci-fi and fantasy fanatic, Berin originally went to school to be a writer. "Somewhere during my sophomore year, I took a painting class and fell in love with art. I soon switched majors and graduated with a degree in painting, a truckload of large, abstract canvases and bunch of strange ideas about 'the process'."

Unfortunately, after college the need to make a living prevailed, so Berin put down the brush and pursued a career in graphic design and web programming. "But to be honest, I've never liked typography or code. I did, however, learn to use Photoshop and after years of using it for more traditional photo editing I began experimenting with its natural-media brushes."

This has had a dramatic result: "I'm in love again." The canvas is smaller now and the subject matter has changed, "but the tools are so much cooler than before. Painting digitally is just so powerful, mutable and fast. And, oh yeah, fun."

QUEEN OF THIEVES "My wife calls this one 'Maid Marian with an attitude'." Berin's thief has blocked the road and we the viewer are definitely about to get robbed.

SIGNET "Another example of me trying to mix the abstract and figurative," explains Berin. "It's the view from a floating complex in orbit around a gas giant. The woman in the foreground is the ruler of this space-faring castle."

Eric Spray

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showthread.php?t=71614
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SOFTWARE: Photoshop CS2, Illustrator
CS2, Corel Painter

Currently a senior at the Columbus College of Art & Design, majoring in Illustration, Eric intends to pursue a career as a concept artist upon graduating.

"The emphasis of my art is directed towards environmental design," says Eric. "However, abnormally large monsters often work their way into my illustrations." A possible explanation for this could be found in Eric's early movie collection: "As a child it consisted of films like Godzilla, King Kong, Clash of the Titans, The Seventh Voyage of Sinbad, and Jason and the Argonauts. I used to watch these films religiously. It's why my art has become so heavily influenced by fantasy and sci-fi themes."

1 THE REIGN OF THE BEAST The topic for this illustration was 'Welcome to the Beginning of the End.' "I chose to illustrate my interpretation of the end of the world as a giant Hell beast walking down a city street at night."

2 THE SEA SEUSS MONSTER "A page from a children's book by Dr Seuss inspired me to create this one," explains Eric. "It's an old pirate ship that is about to be consumed by an enormous whale-like creature."

🇺🇸 **Tony Frerking**
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SOFTWARE: Photoshop, Painter

By day a senior multimedia designer for a local investment management firm, Tony uses illustration as a way to escape the tight regimen of brand-based designing. Don't let on, but he tells us that "Often, lurking behind the quarterly collateral pieces on my system is my latest self-assigned fantasy illustration."

When it comes to look and feel, Tony enjoys putting humour into his work, taking myths and legends and giving them a different twist. "It's fun to push myself and try new styles," he says. "Just to see what evolves."

Photoshop and Painter are Tony's chosen digital tools, but he also turns to Lightwave and Animation Master from time to time.

1 THE SWORD AND THE ACORN This piece uses a slight variation of the damsel-in-distress concept. Instead of a huge dragon and noble knight coming to the rescue, "the valiant squirrel fights a venomous snake to rescue his love," says Tony.

2 FOWL DEATH "What if the penguins fought back?" Tony's daughter came up with the name for this piece. It stuck, so he painted it on the penguin's weapon.

Nei Ruffino
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SOFTWARE: openCanvas v.1,
Photoshop CS2, Painter

"I've always been obsessed with colour," says Nei. "So it's only fitting that now I colour comics as a professional." Nei has been busy colouring for three years, and although she's picked up a lot, she has no illusions: "I've still got a lot to learn!" Colour is clearly important to Nei: "I believe in lots of colour," she insists, "constantly."

There are other factors too, notably a desire to see the world: "I have a horrible procrastinating sense of wanderlust. I want to move away from here, move to another place where things are exciting and new, some place where I can feel like I belong and find others like me."

1 CENTAUR ARCHER "Through time I've always liked to draw centaurs," says Nei. "This is my latest. Probably my best work to date."

2 GEARS "Done just because I wanted to paint something with gears. I love the idea of everyday fantasy and I've taken a liking to gears and steampunk stuff too."

🇺🇸 Rob Stacy, aka Sinix
LOCATION: US
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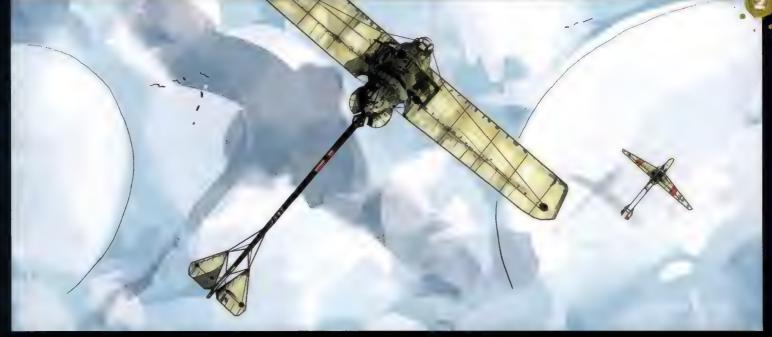SOFTWARE: Painter IX

"I'm a true product of the internet age," Rob proclaims. "I got into art four years ago, only after failing at everything else and dropping out of high school, due to creative differences." Rob has had no formal training in art, "but I continually learn at an accelerated rate due to the wonderful community at ConceptArt.org."

"I still consider myself a student," he adds. "And I haven't begun to truly explore my ambitions yet. I'm looking forward to finding new ways to put forth stories or concepts. I want to explore the way people view life, which, as a secular determinist, may explain some of my interest in violence and mechanical/SF art."

The times are exciting indeed, and the future is bright. For Rob: "global connectivity and digital art technology are ushering in a true golden age. Creativity is a beast we share, individuals feeding off those who came before and morphing old visions into something new. Now it's happening at an amazing rate. This is just the start."

1 DARKSHARK MECH "I had no idea what this would turn out as when I started," says Sinix. "I started dabbing out a random silhouette and managed to pull a mech out of it. I left it at that."

2 CARGO GLIDER A large gliding airship for which Rob used a minimal amount of lines to establish the general outlines, then rendered it through with the Thick and Thin pen.

Jeong Mo Yang
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SOFTWARE: Photoshop CS

Born in South Korea, raised in Argentina, Jeong Mo Yang has been living in Los Angeles for the past 10 years. "My childhood dream was to create my own comic," says Jeong. "And it's a dream that I'm still pursuing to this very day.

"The beauty about creating your own comic is that can play God: you get to create your own story, world, and characters." It was in the process of dreaming up these characters that Jeong began to experiment with digital painting, "And now, I'm completely in love with it."

Currently working as a storyboard artist and as a comic artist, "I'm also dealing with Tokyopop to put out my own book (called Dyoz for now), and therefore fulfil my childhood dream once and for all." At some point, Jeong would like to work as a concept artist for video games, "And after that, become a movie director!"

1 B.B.B. (BAD BIG BOY) Created for a fantasy comic that it's currently being pitched at Tokyopop, "He would play the role of a... bad big boy."

2 WARRIOR "An old warrior that wanders the deserts representing his lost kingdom."

Dimitrios Kounios

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SOFTWARE: Maya 8, Photoshop CS2, ArtRage, ZBrush 2.5, After Effects

Dimitrios has always been interested in digital art. "Eventually I enrolled in Visual Arts at the University of Regina."

But while sculpture, painting and learning about art history was fun, "It simply wasn't satisfying my passion for fantasy concepts and animation." This problem resolved itself in 2005 when a multimedia institute opened its doors nearby, "and changed my life forever."
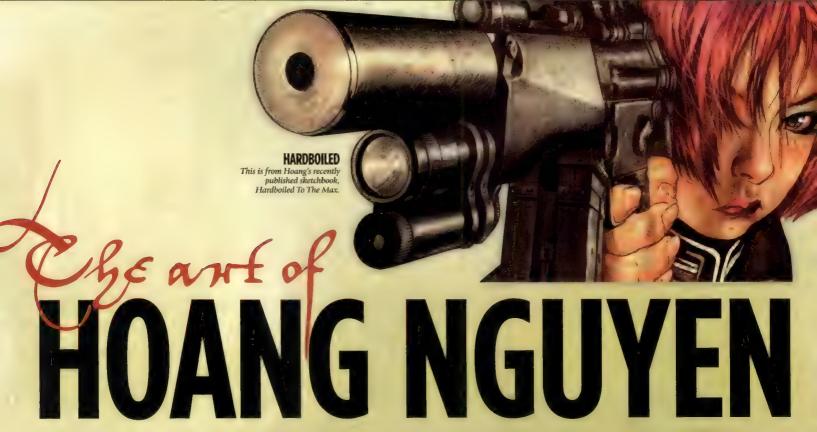
Dimitrios received his certification in Multimedia Studies and 3D Animation and Game Design in just two years, and is busy working towards a career in the video game and movie industries as a concept artist or 3D modeller.

"I would eventually like to develop my own movie script along with all of the corresponding concept artwork."

1 UNDERWATER CREATURE This piece started life monochromatic and abstract but, "eventually, after adding more detail, I noticed it was starting to form into a squid-like creature."

2 WARRIOR GIRL Initially a practice study on female anatomy, which Dimitrios continued to add detail to.

3 STONE EAGLE "A simple Photoshop sketch done as a concept piece for a video game mod."

HOANG
NGUYEN

MATHILDA
This image of Hoang's Mathilda
brings it all together with his love of
WWI tech and foxy young ladies
and is over in the page.

The art of
HOANG NGUYEN

"I'm trying to capture a mood or a moment lost in time. That's most appealing to me."

arcel Proust believed that art could be used as a key to unlock memories hidden from our recollections. Hoang Nguyen is coming round to the same conclusion. "Lately, I like to paint pictures that capture a certain mood or an emotional state, usually someone in deep thought or sadness," he says.

He's currently working as a character modeller at Electronic Arts, but Hoang's previous incarnations include illustrator and comic book artist. His daydreams are filled with one question: "How I can paint all day and travel the world, absorbing all the different cultures, taking pictures and documenting places that I've been to?"

Hoang's personal work, recently collected in a hardbound edition, reveals an amazing imagination twinned with a great insight into what makes art reach into our heads and draw out something special.

ALWAYS BROODING

Hoang was born and raised in Vietnam during the war. His family migrated to the US when he was nine. "I remember seeing tanks and military jeeps rolling down the street," he says. It's amazing what you get used to, though: "Except for the bombing raids at night, life went on as normal."

To some extent, we are our memories – in this sense, Hoang has a very rich, interesting

perspective. "When I was in high school and through my college days, my paintings were very dark and violent. I was always brooding," he says. But an artist makes sense of the world through his work, and Hoang's underlying view of the world eventually asserted itself. "Now all I want to do is paint flowers!" he laughs.

Sensitivity is essential if your artwork is to engage with its viewer at all; this is true whether you paint flowers or fighting robots. Hoang works on another level too. He manages to capture the feeling of recollection, to be simply evocative without forcing a particular story on you. This is a strange talent. "It might have something to do with the birth of my two sons," he speculates. "They're the biggest joy in my life."

FEELING OF PLACE

Though he started his professional career as a comic book artist, Hoang has a fine appreciation of vintage, of how time and repeated viewing can add meaning to an object. Things that have endured have something special. "There are certain qualities about them that you can't replace," he explains. "I'll look at something old ➤➤

FLOWER POWER
Hoang's paintings at college were dark and violent, but now he says he wants to paint flowers.

DAYDREAM BELIEVER

Hoang is a firm believer in daydreaming, and his story is proof that dreams can come true.

→ and wonder how people lived before, what it was like, and how time has passed."

Hoang rolls such objects around to feel the memories they are holding. "Every piece of a thing, every object can be traced back to someone or someplace." Doing this gives you an inside-out picture of a thing, but this can be a difficult experience. "Nowadays, lots of buildings and high-rises are popping up and I feel that they don't really have a soul; it's all too sterile."

It's all about the grease under the finger-nails of life for Hoang. He's looking for the details that tell the story, such as a torn photo on a dirty newspaper. "These memories are reflected in my paintings. Tendencies to hold on to the past." It's natural that this type of thing will lead to introspection: "Maybe I'm just getting old..."

STRANGERS

"As a little kid I started out with a piece of chalk and eventually grabbed on to anything I could find. I'd draw on walls,

to paint, sometimes producing three canvasses a month, and rapidly built up a portfolio. "Then, after seeing Frank Frazetta and Boris Vallejo's work, I decided that this was the career that I would pursue. I wanted to be a cover artist and to this day it's still a dream of mine," he says.

PERSISTENCE

A fervent believer in daydreaming, Hoang has a story about the power of persistence. "When I was in high school, all I wanted was to become a comic book artist. Every summer, I'd spend most of my time creating my own comics."

Nothing else mattered: "I didn't care about money; all I wanted to do was what I loved the most. So in my senior year of high school, I told my dad I wanted to go to New York and work for Marvel." Mr Nguyen realised that resistance was futile. "My poor dad probably didn't have the heart to say no, so he took me up to the Big Apple." Big brother came along for moral support.

MEMORIES LOST
Classic Hoang, this piece delivers a punch on many levels. "Memories of days gone by," says Hoang.

On arrival, the Nguyen men headed straight for Marvel HQ: "I told the receptionist that I wanted to see Jim Shooters." The then editor-in-chief was unavailable. "What a dumbass!" laughs Hoang. "I had no clue; I thought you could just drop in and ask to see whomever." Fortunately, the receptionist was kind-hearted, so she checked with the submissions editor, who suggested Hoang leave his portfolio. This had all the hallmarks of a brush with a stony and uncaring world.

"I was pissed off. It had been a long journey. I told her that I'd come all the **→**
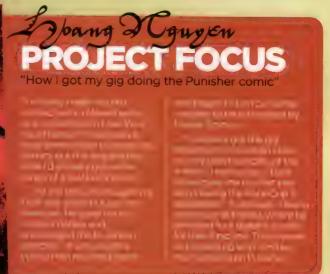
66 I'll look at something old and wonder how people lived before, what it was like, and how time has passed 99

chalkboards, and anything else I could draw on. Mostly it was doodles and chicken scratches but my love was always comics." Despite this, when going to college, Hoang had set his sights on architecture.

Unfortunately, this plan had a serious flaw. "My mathematics wasn't going any further than pluses and minuses." So he switched to illustration, which made more sense. "As a little kid I would spend most of my time copying or creating my own comics. Creating all sorts of characters and their scenarios. At high school I experimented with colour, chalk, acrylic, oils and watercolours, anything I could get my hands on."

Pocket money was precious: "All the money I could save up went toward buying art supplies." At this point Hoang started

Hoang Nguyen
PROJECT FOCUS
"How I got my gig doing the Punisher comic"

SNAKE
This is a promotional piece for a Snake Plissken game, which unfortunately never got off the ground.

Hoang Nguyen

ARTIST TIP
FOLLOW YOUR DREAM
As far as art is concerned, follow your dream and your heart. I know that sounds corny, but if you're not happy with what you're doing, you've got to change it. The need to express oneself artistically can be overwhelming at times. But if

ETERNAL SORROW
Beauty and sorrow are two of Hoang's favourite subjects, combined here

➤➤ way from Virginia, but it didn't help. I went home and feeling so tired and disappointed I almost gave up." A week later Hoang called up the editor. "He gave me a nice speech and rejection letter and told me to keep trying." Moral of the story? "Never give up. Five years later I got my break."

JOBS

After graduating as an illustration major, Hoang went to work at a design shop, doing advertising work. He stayed there a full five years. "Must have been the free beer every Friday! I can't believe I stayed so long." After that came comics. "I sent out tons of submissions and got a lot of rejection letters. But persistence ruled the day. I got my first gig with Dark Horse working on a RoboCop movie adaptation."

Next up was DC Comics. "They were trying to bring back those old characters from the past. A gallant attempt, but it fell by the wayside." Then Marvel came calling and Hoang got to work on Carl Potts's Alien Legion. "That series was so much fun." And while he was at the Marvel office, it made sense to show a few people his portfolio: "That's how I got in touch with the Punisher editors. It didn't take long to convince them to let me have a stab at it."

Hoang is proud of this latest work for Marvel. "Granted the anatomy is horrible, but there were some really dynamic and fore-shortened camera shots." Malibu came next, but after just nine months the company went belly-up and Hoang left comics behind. It's just as well, he muses, because "If I was working on a comic today it would take me forever to finish. I over-analyse everything."

LITTLE RED
"My version of Little Red Riding Hood, with a bit of a twist."

PROGRESS

Without that habit, however, there would be no progress. "Mostly I try to work on my weak areas," says Hoang. "The tendency is to fall back on something we're familiar with, so I like to experiment and go out of my comfort zone."

As for style, this is something that just evolves over the years, never fully coming to rest. But, Hoang is quick to add, "Hopefully, I'll be able to get comfortable with my techniques and style."

A significant factor in Hoang's work is the fact that he rarely produces just 'a picture of X' – there's usually more to it than that. "Composition is important, mainly because I'm doing a lot more paintings. Years ago, when I was working on comics, there really wasn't time to think or make an effort, since the deadlines were so tight." But when the opportunity presents itself, an artist should take his time.

"It's a process of deciding what it is that I want to convey and how I can draw the viewer into my world. As time goes by, you begin to see improvement. You look back on your work and think 'those works were awful', but it's the experiences that you can't replace. Mistakes are a great way to learn: the road to improvement is paved with will, persistence and the passion for art." ●

Workshop
BEAUTIFUL PORTRAITS

Hoang Nguyen
VITAL STATISTICS
"Stay in school and study" to reach your goals

Age

Location

Favourite traditional artist?

Favourite music?

Favourite digital artist?

Are you a tidy person or a scruffy one?

Does anything keep you awake at night?

Average time spent on an image?

Superpower you'd most like to have?

What's the first image you remember being truly awestruck by?

The single most important piece of professional advice?

Left or right-handed?

Artist PROFILE

Hoang Nguyen
COUNTRY: USA
CLIENTS: Marvel Comics, DC Comics, Dark Horse Comics, Electronic Arts

A talented and versatile artist, Hoang Nguyen was born in Vietnam, August 1966. Before his 10th birthday, he escaped to the US where he eventually landed a job with Dark Horse Comics. Subsequently pencilling for both DC and Marvel, Hoang now works for Electronic Arts.
www.liquidbrush.com

Try it yourself
For all the files you need, visit www.imaginefx.com and click on Downloads. For a trial of Photoshop, visit www.adobe.com

Photoshop

CREATE STRIKING PORTRAITS

Hoang Nguyen explains how to create a simple composition, lay out an interesting background and define the light source

Basic composition is very important. Many artists put too much distracting detail in their paintings, so in this workshop we'll focus on how to direct viewers into the image and simplify the background, so it doesn't overwhelm the main theme. Then we'll explore how to create an interesting background to complement the subject. Lastly, we'll define where the light source is coming from, to tie all the elements together.

Whether your subject is a landscape, portrait or still life, it needs a central focal point. What is it you want to convey and what is it that you want to get across? You need to be able to capture a viewer's attention and keep them interested. In order to do that you must produce what appeals to you the most. What moves you? How do you feel about the subject matter? Don't produce art just for the sake of art.

For this workshop, I'm creating an image that appeals to me – an image that incorporates something old and something modern: a sort of take on East meets West.

1 Composition
When laying out your art, keep it simple. Sometimes as you start to paint, the painting dictates what you're going to do next. Often happy accidents can occur, sometimes for the best. I like to keep my composition simple and not centre on the image. You also want a viewer's eyes to go directly to the focal point. Once you've established that, you must focus your attention on the subject matter; everything else is just background. My main focus here is the eyes and face.

2 Blocking
I begin with a simple, flat colour. I usually like to paint in layers, so that if I'm not happy with how it turns out, I can just delete it. Here I play around with the hair, experimenting with various brush sizes and opacity.

3 Hat and goggles
With the standard brush set at between 10 to 50 pixels, I play around with values and shadows, trying to define form around the goggles and the pilot hat. I detail in the headgear and play around with the face. I also start laying down some colour for the tattoo.

7 Background

I want to recreate a simple Japanese screen door in the background with some writing on it and an old tree. I'm more concerned with big shapes and colour rather than worrying about details. I go for an olive colour background and keep it almost monochromatic. I start with a flat colour. I Edit>Fill with a standard brush set at 500 pixels and do a gradation from dark to light using quick brush strokes.

8 Screen layers

I copy the colour layer and go to Filter>Render>Cloud and use it as a screen layer. I set the Opacity at 50 per cent, then mask the Cloud layer and fade out the bottom of the image. I keep the gradation from dark at the top and light at the bottom.

6 Blending colours

I block in some colour for the background, just to get a general feel of where I want to go with this. I use cool colour to offset her skin tone, but I stay within the colour palette I want. I usually prefer to keep the colour range to a minimum. The olive background goes well with her headgear, and the brown colour blends nicely with her skin. It really helps to make her stand out and enhance her expression more. This will be the key to my image, so I'll be putting some extra love into it.

4 The skin

I start blocking in the skin colour and defining some shapes and form, especially around the tattoo. At this stage I keep everything fairly flat and simple. Then I paint in the headgear and add another layer of skin colour to blend the head and body. I'm beginning to think about where the light source is coming from, so I can give the form some light and shadow.
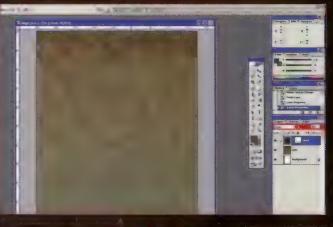
5 Let there be light

I put more details into the headgear and start to focus a bit more on how the light bounces off the goggles. At this point, I've pretty much abandoned the face. I'll get back to it once I've laid out the background.

9 Screen door

With the Marquee tool I mask out a grid and do a colour fill to produce a Japanese screen door. At the moment it's very simple and blocky. Next I do a Gaussian blur and fade out the middle of the grid. Using the Gradient tool, I fade from left to right, keeping it subtle and thinking about the light source coming from the right side.

10 Dry brushing

I use a dry brush technique, basically dipping a brush into an ink jar and drying it as much as possible, then painting with it on paper. I create two images: one is a dried-up tree, and the other a letter written in kanji (Chinese characters), done in a similar style to an old Japanese wood block painting. I scan the images in, do some adjustment and off we go.

11 Face details

Now that I have the background and most of the elements in place, I'm going to focus on the face. I start to build up layers of skin tone and add various hues, mostly purples and blues, beneath the skin layer. This process is very important in building up realistic skin shade, because it will give the face more depth and form. As light bounces off the face, certain regions will be lighter than others, especially under the eyes and around her eyelids. I also start to erase and soften the pencil underneath her lips. I'll add highlights and details later, but I'm now more concerned with getting the shapes and forms right.

12 All in the eyes

Eyes hold such emotion – you can tell if someone is laughing or crying just by looking into them. They're always an important element in all my paintings, to enable me to capture a certain look. I start detailing around the iris and her eyelashes. Using just the regular brush and setting my brush size between 4 and 10 pixels, I focus more on her mascara and highlights. I also add detail to her eyebrows and define them more, keeping them trim and sharp.

13 Moles

I paint in some birthmarks and moles to make the skin more realistic. Our faces are made up of lots of pores and these flaws help define who we are. Cindy Crawford comes to mind. On a different Multiplier layer I apply more makeup around her eyes. Using a muted olive green. I apply a thin layer over and around her eyelids. I also soften the area around the eyes to reduce the intensity of her look. I'm pretty happy with her face at this point, so I call it quits for now. I'll add more details, such as light and shadows, once I'm near the end.

14 Combine elements

At this stage, I'm ready to combine various elements and begin to finalise the painting. I drop in the background and mask it around the figure. I also copy and paste another layer to darken it a bit.

15 Add the kanji

The kanji and the tree are added as a Multiplier layer with the Opacity set to 80 per cent. I then paint in the light source and try to soften her look a bit. I'm getting close to finishing the painting; I just need to combine the foreground and background together; right now it looks like she's floating over

the background. I flatten the image and make a duplicate copy.

16 Light adjustments

I go to Filter>Render>Lighting Effects, which brings up a dialog box. I use a spotlight and adjust the light fall-off. After playing around with various settings I hit OK. Next, I create a mask and adjust the shadow and light intensity; now the background and foreground blend rather nicely. There are lots of ways you can achieve this effect – you can paint in the shadow using Multiplier layers or you can use the Dodge tool, for example. I prefer the latter technique, since it's fast and you can adjust the settings until you're satisfied. At this stage, I'm very close to finishing the painting – I just need to go in and add the final details.

17 Final adjustments

After printing out the image, I realise the background is too muddy and the whole picture looks out of focus. The light effect doesn't work for me: the fall-off is what's causing the blurring. So back to basics, I paint a shadow and overlay it as a Multiplier, with the Opacity set to 85 per cent. I also go back and bring the text back into focus. I then overlay the whole image with a rice-paper pattern. You can get these papers at any art and craft store. The texture gives the image much more depth and helps to weather the look a bit. ●

Chris Malidore
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EMAIL: evanlais@yahoo.com
SOFTWARE: Photoshop 7, Painter IX

"I can't say illustration came easy for me in terms of learning the trade and enhancing my skills," says Chris. "But it is certainly a dream come true to do something that I love and actually call it my job."
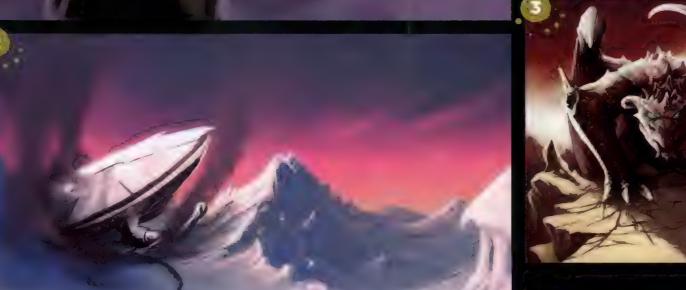
Chris began freelancing as an illustrator back in 2002, and started using digital means to paint in 2003. "And while I've always preferred using graphite for art, there are endless possibilities and a huge amount of enjoyment to be had as a digital painter and I don't regret taking it up as a medium one bit."

With great emphasis on composition and dynamics, Chris takes an average of one to two days to create a new image. "When time permits, for my personal pieces at least, humour has been and always will be an important aspect – and while I don't embrace humour for every picture I create, it certainly helps me feel grounded as an illustrator."

1 BLAOW It really is amazing how difficult some poses are to capture: "I tried for a very long time to get this right and I still don't think I got it."

2 ORIGIN "This is a fine example of me trying to take what could otherwise be a normal scene and tossing in something to give it that amusing, or unexpected, feeling," says Chris. "In this case I ask, where did penguins truly come from?"

3 THE DRAGON "If I had to paint only one creature for the rest of my life," says Chris, "it would probably have to be dragons. I'm always fascinated exploring the anatomy and different things you can do with their features, colours and whatnot."

🇺🇸 **Jennifer Reagles**
LOCATION: US
WEB: saiaii.com
EMAIL: saiaii@saiaii.com
SOFTWARE: Paint Shop Pro, Painter,
3ds max and Poser

A self-taught artist, Jennifer has enjoyed art since she was very young. Her goal is to have a gallery that would showcase digital artists and to finally purchase a graphics tablet, because "Painting with a mouse can get very tedious!"

"I began experimenting with digital art approximately five years ago," Jennifer recalls. At first she used Paint Shop Pro, and today most of her work is a combination of Paint Shop Pro and Painter, with some elements created in Poser. "I aim to create mystical beauty," says Jennifer, "and if someone views my art and thinks it's beautiful, then all the time spent on it is worthwhile."

These days it's mostly fantasy art, "but I still create some dark art and more traditional works as well." Jennifer has completed several book, CD and magazine covers. She was also featured in the first issue of Exotique from Ballistic Publishing and is also in the recently released Exotique 2.

1 MERA I "Mera I reflects the beauty of a mermaid and my efforts to make her fluid," explains Jennifer.

IFX INSIGHT

"Mera is certainly beautiful, and I love the contrast between the dark, swirling water and the light she's rising up to, like the two sides of a mermaid's personality."
Kay Inglis,
Production Editor

Justin Chase Black
LOCATION: US
WEB: www.throwingchicken.com
EMAIL: chase@throwingchicken.com
SOFTWARE: Photoshop

As a young man Justin was always interested in anything science fiction – "Books, television shows, movies, other art, even science-reality," he says. If it involved aliens or robots, it had his attention.

"As it is with most artists, my work reflected things I'm passionate about. But once I got into college I had to abandon illustrating the things I liked and focus on illustrating for others." And after working his way through a set of foundation courses, Justin had almost forgotten about the work that had fuelled him in the first place.

So, in his own time Justin taught himself Photoshop and learned to paint digitally. "I can credit my return to sci-fi art to my love for Photoshop," he explains. "And when my courses opened up to allow students to pick their own topics, I found myself using those digital-art skills to tackle a genre that was predominant in my past."

1 THE BROADWICK INFANTRY "This image takes place at the peak of WWII when the armed forces find more than they anticipated on the battlefield. The European landscape is infested with robotic creatures that wipe out soldiers regardless of their nationality. With few men left to fight, women are recruited into the service."

2 SILICA 96 "After the displacement of high-density glass, insurance rep Walter Neff uncovers a plot that could shatter time itself." Oddly, this book doesn't really exist: the image is a product of the freeform method. "My only pre-conceived idea was to have a mad-scientist type character. From that point things just evolved."

Elda The
LOCATION: US
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EMAIL: thousandskies@gmail.com
SOFTWARE: Photoshop

"When I was little," says Elda, "I wanted to be an architect like my mum." But as the years went by, exposure to the animated films of Disney, DreamWorks, Ghibli and others led to a change of heart. "I decided that I wanted to draw to tell a story; I wanted to become an artist."

Elda began to get into digital around 2003. "Before that I mostly used poster paint and watercolours." Now, though, the watercolours only get an occasional outing. "I love how digital almost has no boundaries; you can mix any paint colour on every surface.

"The colours in my work are like the narrator of a story," continues Elda. "I enjoy creating a sense of a world and making the characters interact with their environment."

Born and raised in Indonesia, Elda now lives in the US, where, in spring last year, she earned her BFA in media studies from Columbus College of Arts and Design. She now works at Gaia Interactive Co.

1 PAPER PLANE "When the little boy felt he was an outcast, he would go to a rooftop."

2 A GIFT AND A JOURNEY "The two eels love to give presents and directions, the orange fish hates the idea of a long journey, and the main character just goes with the flow." Makes perfect sense.

Justin Adams
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hotmail.com
SOFTWARE: Painter, Photoshop CS2

"Like most art kids," Justin tells us, "I was born with a crayon in my hand." That said, the influences from his youth were a pretty tough bunch: "the characters in GI Joe, He-Man, and Marvel comics. Movies like Predator, RoboCop, Aliens, and Blade Runner also fit in the mix."

Justin is self-taught: "I've been painting digitally for about two years. It all started while trying to sell some drawings in Union Square, NYC, and some kid came up to me and suggested I take a look at ConceptArt.org." Justin is immeasurably grateful for the helpful artists on ConceptArt.org: "If it wasn't for CA I don't think the digital arts community would be as strong as it is." So now the focus is solely on digital painting – "well... and tattooing." With luck Justin will be doing book covers, RPG illustrations, and video game covers in the future.

1 BARRETT "This is a tribute piece influenced by a Mucha painting," says Justin. "I liked the pose so I copied it and threw in my own two cents."

2 ERGASTOR Ergastor is one of many characters Justin is developing for an upcoming multi-media novel. "The painting was also my first foray into Painter IX."

Reader
EXPosé
THE PLACE TO SHARE YOUR DIGITAL ART

Jeff Lee Johnson

LOCATION: US
WEB: http://thejeff.cgsociety.org/gallery/
EMAIL: thejeff@comcast.net
SOFTWARE: Corel Painter, Photoshop

"Fantasy and sci-fi art and literature have been inspiring me since I was a young boy," says Jeff. "Tales of magical worlds inhabited by fantastic creatures kept me reading late into many a night."

Although his training was in fine art, he has never stopped admiring the works of artists such as Pyle, Wyeth and Frank Frazetta.

Given the foregoing, "I'm not too surprised that I have ended up where I am – with stylus in hand, attempting to make a place for myself among the legion extraordinaire of gifted artists."

1 MURDER IN MARIENBURG This piece is the cover art for the fantasy novel A Murder in Marienburg by David Bishop, published by Games Workshop. The assignment asked for a homage to Rembrandt's Abraham and Isaac set in the medieval world of Warhammer, "with a couple of hapless watchmen subbing for the title characters and the sublime angel replaced by a murderous giant ninja rat. Could it get any better than that?"

2 OLD SCHOOL "A wizened old conjurer does a little light reading." So familiar with magic that he uses it almost without noticing.

Artist crit

Artist: Anna Dahlig
gives her opinion

"I really love this painting. Everything is composed very well – the colour choices are harmonic and vivid. The loose yet detailed brush stroking gives the piece a certain 'classical art' quality. What I like the most about this painting, however, is the light source execution. It simply makes the piece for me. A brilliant work all round"

Bob Eggleton

"Alone in the vastness, but standing on higher ground," Bob Eggleton's
art reaches into the darkness and brings back something fantastic

There's a school of fantastic art that has sunk its roots deep into the earth and come up with something a little strange – something that has you worrying about home security, the locks on the doors and that light in the basement.

Though his subject matter ranges from pure science fiction through to horror, the thing that unifies Bob Eggleton's work is his ability to capture the sensation of wordless incomprehension – the precursor to both amazement and fear. His work has the ability to arrest the attention.

Bob learned to draw when he was about four or five: "My dad sat me down and taught me perspective,

and at 18 months – so Mum claims – I knew all my primary colours and could name them."

Some years later, this bright-eyed beginning connected with the randomising Arthur C Clarke factor: "2001: A Space Odyssey was a turning point for me at nine years of age. It was like an epiphany in fact."

DINOSAURS

Pulling these observations together, Bob recalls his father taking him to the 1964 World's Fair in New York. "They had this Sinclair Dinosaur Exhibit. I was four at the time, but it just blew my mind." He could now put a name to it: "The fascination I

had was with anything vast or big. Whether it was the size of Godzilla or the immensity of space."

ALONE IN THE VASTNESS

If scale was the starting point, then an unwillingness to accept the world at face value was Bob's chosen direction to head in. "Alone in the vastness" he might be, but also "standing on higher ground and fighting off the forces of mundanity."

These two forces led to fantasy art: "I found SF and fantasy this terrific way of expressing ideas that some might not be able to accept if presented in a straightforward manner" – the kind of ideas that require dressing ➤

BOB'S WORLD
Bob's influences include dinosaurs and the vast... ...of... anything huge and expansive.

TAU ZERO
The jacket for a Poul Anderson collection called
To Outlive Eternity. "This was a fun piece that I
did in something like a day," says Bob. "I wanted
the feel of those old 60s paperbacks."

GODZILLA
...2002 film...
...Last Emperor... Godzilla...
Bob Mastodon...

66 Thing is, I have this dark side,
but unlike people who are scared
of theirs, I kind of take mine out
and have some fun with him. I look
on it as paying the Devil his due 99

up to become palatable during times
of conflict: "Star Trek did that well
back in the Vietnam days."

In a similar vein: "Godzilla is a
warning against abuses of nuclear
energy. The original, Japanese film
Gojira is terrific and stands as a classic
to this day." Science fiction isn't just
about escapism and fun, though, "It's
a way of looking at ideas, and the
world, if you will."

PAYING THE DEVIL
Bob's work isn't all allegory, though,
there's a note of darkness, which
comes through, above and beyond
the actual themes he works with. "I
suppose I had a rough time on my
own," says Bob. "I had a lot of anger
too, due to kind of being a 'freak' in
high school."
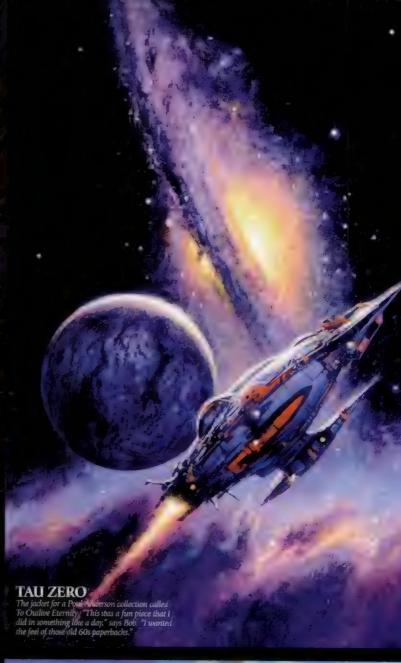
Merging these emotions with his
visual flair gives Bob's work a powerful
energy source. "Thing is, I have this
dark side," he says, "but, unlike people

who are scared of theirs, I kind of take
mine out and have some fun with
him. I look on it as paying the Devil
his due."

And the Devil is more than
generous with the goods he supplies
in return. Bob is a nine-time Hugo
Award winner, and his work stirs the
imagination without ever slipping
into cliche. At least part of the reason
for this is his determination always
to work from the source: "Art is
exploration and evolution in action."

This process has naturally taken
Bob from book covers and illustration
on to concept work for film. Although
he's credited as a 'running extra' in the
2002 film Godzilla vs Mechagodzilla,
he says: "My big break came when I
got a call from John A Davis to work
on Jimmy Neutron: Boy Genius."

John wanted to work with the guys
who inspired him, so Bob found
himself on a team that included Fred
Gambino and Don Maitz. "We did a

YEAR'S BEST SF
Bob painted this piece for a limited edition run of The Year's Best SF. "I had a totally open ticket here," he recalls. "They just said, 'have fun'."

CAPTURING CTHULHU IN CORRECT COLOUR
Cover design for Weird Shadows Over Innsmouth

Stephen Jones, editor of Weird Shadows, wanted a title to stand out amid the big collection of Cthulhu tales. He turned to Bob for a different take on the devil of the deep and his fishy followers, the Deep Ones.

"What I was looking for," Stephen recalls, "was not any subtle colour painting – what I wanted though was something bold, but also a minimum of image that would help sell the book." As old friends, the two had an immediate rapport and with minimum fuss Bob went away to cook something up.

Looking for a way to evoke a sense of darkness and evil, Bob wound up putting an odd carving on the rock above the scene. But when it comes to the real stuff, and keep trying to see a sense of what Bob did with the colours," agrees Stephen.

Bob, for his part, is a water baby: he's never happier than when he's painting the sea. "The blues and the greens just gave it this twilight feel, perhaps as the sun dips down on the horizon and the moon gets brighter," he says.

www.herebedragons.co.uk/jones

THE ANT BULLY
Bob's work on The Ant Bully has confirmed his move into the world of concept art.

ton of work and designed a film in a record amount of time. You can see me in the monster Poultra and a lot of the creature stuff."

REFORMING
The success of Jimmy Neutron meant that when John was shaping up for The Ant Bully he naturally wanted to re-form the old team. "The thing about working in films is that you have to leave your ego at the door. A film should never look like the work of one artist, but a kind of amalgam of all the styles of work," Bob notes.

Bob's a busy guy. There's another film project in the pipeline, book illustrations, covers for a new set of Brian Lumley stories and the daily updated art blog. It seems that life is just too brief: "I'll never live long enough to do all my ideas." In the face of that you have to make some decisions: "I have to do what I can."

Somewhere in there you have to start thinking about your own needs: "I want to take time out and do some paintings for me!" says Bob. "Big epic kind of things." Somehow you knew it wasn't going to involve miniatures: "I like the 'big picture'," he laughs. "Once again it comes back to what I said about vastness. Claustrophobic is just not me."

Reader
EXPosé
THE PLACE TO SHARE YOUR DIGITAL ART

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EMAIL: ccramp@fullerton.edu
SOFTWARE: Photoshop and Painter

Cliff Cramp's illustration work spans a wide range of genres in the entertainment industry: background painting for animation, storyboard and visual development, art for feature film, CD and DVD cover art, editorial and book illustration.

"I recently finished the illustrations for the board game Pirate King, for Temple Games," he adds. Nickelodeon TV, DIK Entertainment, Disney and Fox are among his current and past clients, and "my paintings have been exhibited in many international competitions."

But tragedy struck in the year 2000, when, Cliff explains, "a studio fire destroyed more than 10 years of artwork. After that I switched to digital media." Painter is the program of choice and Cliff has received award-winning status on CGTalk.
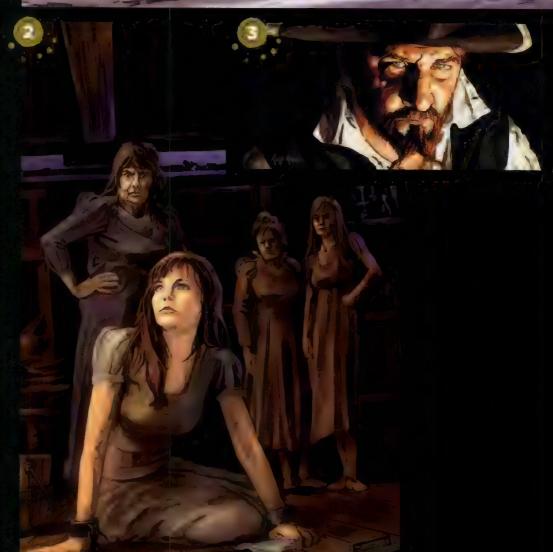
Cliff continues his freelance career while serving as area coordinator for the illustration program at California State University Fullerton. He instructs illustration courses in both traditional and digital media.

1 THE GREAT RACE Cliff's 1962 Mini Cooper was the inspiration for this image, as well as his 1959 Frogeye Sprite. "I thought it would be fun to combine the two classic cars into a light-hearted image depicting the start of an old fashioned car rally."

2 HOPE Inspired by the fairytale Cinderella: "I wanted to create an image that showed hope, even when circumstances do not or should not provoke such a response."

3 ARGYLE THE RED "Argyle the Red is an illustration that I did prior to doing the art for The Pirate King, for Temple Games," explains Cliff. "It was this image that got me the work, and which I then used a variation of for the box art."

Jiaxing Rong

LOCATION: US
WEB: www.jrtistic.com
EMAIL: jr@jrtistic.com
SOFTWARE: Photoshop

"I enjoy watching cartoons just as much as I enjoy going to the Metropolitan Museum of Art," says Jiaxing. He carries his enjoyment of variety into the themes of his work: "So my favourite illustrations depict characters doing everyday things set in extraordinary worlds."

Although Jiaxing was originally interested in fine arts, "I found going from oil paints to Photoshop to be very easy. Eventually I grew out of trying to get my digital illustrations to mimic traditional media." Right now the goal is to explore the possibilities of Photoshop combined with packages such as Maya.

1 MONKEYBOT When a cyborg girl living in the jungle becomes part of it, this is what you get, "just a mix of man and nature and technology."

2 ATIKO Portrait of a princess. "Using traditional portraiture mixed with abstract shapes I wanted to flow throughout the image."

3 BATTLEDOME2 "The ultimate attack dog" was inspired by the television show Battlebots.

IFX INSIGHT

"Jiaxing shows a masterful skill of depicting monkey expressions in Monkeybot. This is obviously an object the simian has never chanced upon before."
Tom Rudderham, DVD Editor

Abdel Stewart
LOCATION: US
WEB: www.artbyabdel.com
EMAIL: info@artbyabdel.com
SOFTWARE: Photoshop CS, Painter IX

"When I was a kid I was always interested in illustrating things of a sci-fi/fantasy nature," says Abdel. "My passion for illustrating grew through the years and led me to getting a degree in graphic arts."

Abdel's been freelancing for about four years and he has a strong liking for digital art. "My interest in digital illustration started out when I found out about Photoshop 4. Then it quickly grew when I got my first Wacom Graphire tablet," he says.

As for his style of drawing, Abdel describes it as "a less-is-more approach. Keeping it simple and adding details where necessary is one the best pieces of advice I've ever got."

1 AWAKENING This piece depicts an alien princess from the planet Ubeka. "She is armed with a light blade and wears a living suit of armour," explains Abdel. He used the lighting to bring out the mood of this piece, while a custom brush was used to create the light effects for the suit.

2 WHERE AM I? Accompanied by his robot assistant, XL2, Dr Lewis sets out to explore the planet his ship crash-landed on. "In this sci-fi piece I spent some time trying to create a unique space suit, while the characters portray a sort of quirkiness," Abdel explains. He created this piece in Photoshop.

3 TECH NINJA "This is my depiction of a futuristic Ninja," says Abdel. "His suit is made of a lightweight material, which enables agility and speed. I went with an anime feel for this illustration, using Photoshop to do the inking and colouring."

Eric Lofgren

LOCATION: Canada
WEB: www.ericlofgren.net
EMAIL: eclofgren@shaw.ca
SOFTWARE: Photoshop 6

Eric was raised in an area of abundant natural beauty. "Living on the west coast of Canada has always inspired me as an artist," he says. "And since I never had the opportunity to go to art school, that inspiration has sustained me over the years."

In the meantime Eric did, of course, read a lot about art, digesting volumes on his favourite artists. It was, in fact, after discovering Frank Frazetta that he realised what he wanted to do. "I would be an artist in the fantasy and sci-fi fields, as those genres hold so much everlasting interest and inspiration."

Today, Eric finds himself working as a professional, involved with companies such as White Wolf, AEG and Infinite-Interactive. His capacities are various – "everything from CCGs to concept design and RPGs, doing covers, cards, designs and interior illustration."

Eric has every intention to keep on creating as long as there's work to be done, "because, even without the pay, I'd be doing it anyway."

1 DRAGON COVER This is a cover for an RPG module produced by Goodman Games.

2 GABAN Gaban is a character from AEG's Warlord expansion, titled Temple of Lore.

3 NAIRU NO ONI "One of the numerous demons that haunt the world of AEG's Legend of the Five Rings, another CCG. This one was for the Khan's Defiance expansion set."

IFX INSIGHT

"Nairu No Oni is a particularly fearsome-looking demon. Indeed, all three of Eric's RPG based images convey suitably terrifying creatures that I wouldn't want to meet."
**Kay Inglis,
Production Editor**

🇺🇸 **Yang Fan**
LOCATION: US
WEB: www.yangfanart.com
EMAIL: jiuge1111@hotmail.com
SOFTWARE: Photoshop 7

Yang Fan was born and raised in China, "and when I was a child I always liked to doodle around." Her parents first thought this would be nothing more than a little hobby, "but later on they realised my true passion for art, and my talent."

Moving to the United States in 2000, the original plan was to study international business, but Fan changed major to art. Then, at the Art Institute of Seattle, she studied multimedia and web design and graduated in 2003.

"It has been many years since I first started to draw, and it continues to be one of the most important parts of my life," she says. Working as a game artist for Cat Daddy Games, Fan also freelances as an illustrator for various publishers in both the US and China.

1 DA QIAO This image was created for a Three Kingdom game. The character of Da Qiao is known for her elegance and tranquillity: "I tried to recreate her tender, fairy-like beauty."

2 MY DEAR LITTLE THIEF After creating a dark piece, Yang Fan wanted to draw a scene that was much sweeter and warmer, "and slowly she appeared in front of me, a cute young girl that dreams of huge adventure and a freestyle life."

Reader FX Posé
THE PLACE TO SHARE YOUR DIGITAL ART

Antanas K Bulota

LOCATION: US
WEB: akb-illustration.deviantart.com
EMAIL: akb_illustration@yahoo.com
SOFTWARE: Photoshop

"I have been told that before I could walk, I was holding a pencil." Antanas has early memories of drawing fantastical characters, creatures and places from his imagination.

Then he discovered the greats: "Frazetta, The Brothers Hildebrandt and Keith Parkinson, and at that point I knew what I wanted to do for a living."

With the support of his family, Antanas attended Kendall College of Art and Design, earning a Bachelor's in illustration. "While going to school, I focused on the traditional techniques and media, not really seeing the use of the computer."

It wasn't until about four years after graduation that Photoshop entered the equation. "At first I used it to colour some of my sketches and pen drawings," says Antanas. "Then life got in the way of the artwork for a while."

Then, about six months ago, "I picked up the old mouse and set back to creating in earnest." Now, while he continues to do thumbnails and rough concepts on paper, Antanas finishes all his paintings digitally.

1 LAST SURVIVOR + 1 This image was created for one of the Character of the Week contests on ConceptArt.org. "The premise is, a returning warrior finds all the inhabitants of her home planet vanished. The only things alive are a marmoset named Bill and giant mutant cockroaches," says Antanas.

2 CEREBUS "This is my take on the mythological creature, placed in the setting of my book."

Johnnie Houston Estill II

LOCATION: US
WEB: http://estill.cgsociety.org
EMAIL: johnnie_estill@digitalenvi.com
SOFTWARE: 3ds max, Maya, Photoshop, HDR Shop

Johnnie teaches the Video Game Art programme at the Art Institute of California in Orange County, the same school he graduated from in 2005.

Before returning to education, Johnnie worked in the games industry "as a lighting and FX/environment/concept artist at Blizzard Entertainment on StarCraft Ghost." Add to that a stint at Shiny Entertainment on The Matrix: Path Of Neo and you'll get the idea.

Oddly, "I never had the intention of working in the video game industry, and while in school I was grooming myself towards working in motion pictures." In fact Johnnie has had some luck working on small independent films such as The Last Transmission (2003), Scribble (2005), and two Star Wars shorts.

1 THE HUN Johnnie's happy with this one: "It reminds me of a postcard," he muses of his futuristic Hawaii. "It's my kind of place – and look! They even serve Guinness!"

2 ASCENT Using a mix of 3ds max and Photoshop, this is Johnnie's rendering of the moving 'into the light' vision that comes at the time of death. "I always liked that idea," he comments.

3 ALAMAR JUNGLES "These ancient temples emit energy that kept the planet's sparse rings of jungle alive," Johnnie explains. "The jungles can't grow outside of the area in which the emitters can reach."

Chuck Wadey
LOCATION: US
WEB: www.chuckwadey.com
EMAIL: chuck@chuckwadey.com
SOFTWARE: Photoshop CS2
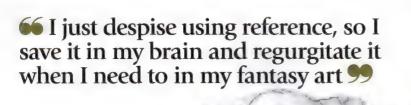
A professional games concept artist, with a CV including Activision's Spider-Man The Movie and Ultimate Spider-Man games, Chuck has also done graphic novel work and was a winner in a recent McFarlane Myspace Art Contest. Chuck is currently accepting freelance contracts.

1 HYPNOTIZING "Hypnotizing was created for one of ConceptArt.org's creature of the week contests," says Chuck. "The creature emits a hypnotic brainwave that generates an artificial devotion so steadfast that any beast will offer itself up for sacrifice, and so powerful that victims rejoice in the consumption of their own flesh..."

66 I just despise using reference, so I save it in my brain and regurgitate it when I need to in my fantasy art 99

The art of
JP TARGETE

He might live in the real world with the rest of us, but for JP Targete seeking out the spiritual enables him to be the storyteller he always wanted to become

T o create successful fantasy art requires a very particular set of skills. Along with the obvious technical ability, an artist must be able to conjure not just the odd character or structure from imagination, but an entire world.

For the likes of NCSoft, Wizards of the Coast and Fantasy Flight Games, JP Targete journeys deep into his imagination, cuts off a large chunk of the netherworld and drags it kicking and screaming into this one. At least that's what it looks like goes into his artworks.

"It's extremely liberating working with fantastic themes," says JP. But there's a risk inherent in anything that requires such a deep immersion: "It can detach you from reality at times." And with that the netherworld theory takes a step closer to becoming fact.

REALITY CHECK
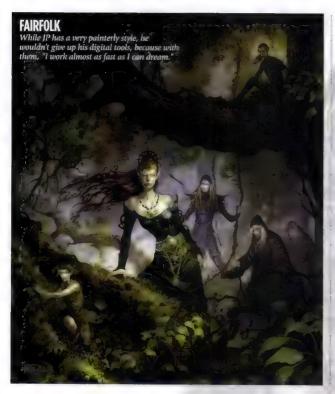
Sure enough, those times of detachment are when you produce great work – the pieces that define an artist and incidentally his chosen medium – but you have to keep your balance. So JP maintains one eye on the everyday: "I try to observe the real world with both a technical and physical mindset but also in an emotional and spiritual way."

Given JP's aversion to the use of reference for his work, this kind of observation is central to his ability to create. Without it, he would have no raw material to work with: "I'm seeing the real world more as a giant library of sight and feeling," he explains. ➤➤

MINOTAUR
Critical to an artist's success is the ability to "tell the story from beginning to end with a single image."

Artist
PROFILE

JP Targete
AGE: 39
COUNTRY: US
JP is an accomplished digital and traditional illustrator, concept artist and art director for books and video games with 17 years experience. He's been doing illustration and concept art for book and RPG publishers, video games and production companies, and is currently working on a full colour, sci-fi fantasy graphic novel. He resides in southern California with his wife and son.
WEB: www.targeteart.com

FAIRFOLK
While JP has a very painterly style, he wouldn't give up his digital tools, because with them, "I work almost as fast as I can dream."

SKETCH 043
JP shows with this sketch his amazing ability to capture life without use of reference.

JP is developing an image of the real world as a manual: "I store the technical information regarding light, form, texture surface, colour in my mind, for later use in my imaginative stuff." As it's drawn into use during the creative process, "I'm able to bring realism and emotion to my fantasy works."

NATURAL BORN DRAWER

Born in New York, JP was raised in Miami, Florida. His father is an architect and so naturally, drawing became a part of his life. "I was always fascinated with drawing," he notes, but despite the obviously strong influence of Targete senior's technical drawing, "I was drawing more organic and character-driven type stuff."

This shows a degree of wilfulness that perhaps helps to explain something of JP's subsequent development into a fantasy artist. However, art school came first, and with it recognition of the youngster's talent: "I studied illustration at the School of Visual Arts in Manhattan on a full scholarship."

Back in New York, JP set to work, studying the old European masters and learning the business of illustration. But the old adage is

> 66 School was great but it took me a while to break out into my own style. Don't take your talent for granted and always follow your heart 99

true: you learn the rules in order to break them. "School was great to learn about techniques, styles etc," agrees JP, "but it took me a while to break out into my own style." The route to this kind of enlightened state? "Don't take your talent for granted and always follow your heart."

EMERGENCE OF STYLE

With diligence, a style will emerge. Interestingly, this happened for JP while he still worked exclusively with traditional media. This wasn't due to any real aversion to pixels: "I would have worked digitally a while back but the tools weren't able to mimic traditional back then."

JP now works about half-and-half traditional to digital. Advances in software have reached the point where boundaries are blurring: "I've learned to imitate traditional materials with my digital work." Given the painterly feel of his work, this is no mean feat.

The danger digital production presents to the artist is a subtle one. The availability of undo and cut-'n'-paste creativity can lead to complacency. JP has remained alert to this, however, and uses a selection of techniques to ensure he stays fresh: "I easily tire of one process," he declares, "because I'm always trying to find efficient or unique ways to create images."

IN THE MIX

Among the choices is the mix of digital to traditional: "One of the processes is, I start off with an idea in my mind then do rough thumbnails with pencil. Once I have something I like, I do a more worked-up sketch." This sketch, still fully traditional, is what the client will approve. Only then does production shift to the computer.

While this first approach mimics the traditional production route, at the opposite end of the spectrum, "I sometimes get an idea and just start painting digitally without a drawing or sketch; this is more intuitive and freeform. The results can be unpredictable at times but also surprisingly good." Maintaining a flexible approach means you always have options. You can look at things from more than one angle.

That brings us neatly to the question of composition. "It's one of the key essentials to doing the type of art that I do," says JP. In other words, composition comes before everything else if you are going to produce an image that engages the viewer on more than one level: "You only have one image to ➤➤

GRAPHIC NOVEL
Finding your niche and sticking to it

GRAPHIC NOVEL
"I'm always a storyteller," says JP. He's decided to explore his imaginings in graphic novel form.

DARK RIDERS
Despite his achievements, JP is always striving to do one piece he is totally happy with.

DARK RIDERS

JP Targete, doin' it for the kids

A film director allegedly once said: "A film is never finished, it's just abandoned." JP has his own take on this: "For me, a painting is never abandoned wilfully, you just run out of time."

This isn't always a bad thing. Knowing when to stop working an image is difficult even for professionals: "However sometimes deadlines lead to a lack of hesitation that helps create a happy little piece that someone will like."

So it was with Dark Riders, the image JP created for his Gnomon Workshop DVD. "It takes me from the beginning stages of my illustration process right through to the very final piece." This piece is epic, but JP remains cagey: "I never think any of my art is great. In fact I'm always searching to do that one piece I am happy with."

FANGATORIA
The key to success, says JP, is never taking your talent for granted. That means practice, practice, practice!

VITAL STATISTICS

Targete's life in a Q&A session...

Full name
Jean Pierre Targete.

Date of birth
21 October 1967.

Favourite music?
Mostly soundtracks.

Favourite traditional artist?
One is Peter Paul Reubens.

Do you consider yourself a well-organised person?
With my art yes, with taxes no.

Last book you read?
Paradise Lost, Philippe Girard.

Average time spent working on an image?
It varies greatly.

Super power you'd most like to have?

The power to clone myself so I could work on multiple projects simultaneously.

What's the first image you remember being truly awestruck by?
A Boris Vallejo work with buff barbarians, half-naked women and some creatures attacking.

The single most important piece of professional advice?
Believe in yourself

Left or right-handed?
Right.

Which historical figure would you most like to meet?
Toussaint Louverture, he lead the way to Haiti's road to independence from France.

➤ deliver a whole story, so the composition needs to invite the viewer in and hold them a while. Long enough to tell a story."

While that's easy to say, it's a skill that takes some development. "Composition is all about positioning and size relation along with the placement of key visual guides that lead the eye." If you're a master, "you can make the viewer look where you want them to, enabling you to tell the story from beginning to end with a single image."

ALWAYS A STORYTELLER

All this from a man who started out painting the covers of romance novels. JP is willing to admit: "When I look back at it now it's pretty horrifying. I can't believe I actually did that type of work because my present work is so far from that right now."

At the moment, things seem to be going JP's way: "I'm a bum," he exclaims. Not literally swigging from half-bottles and sleeping in parks, more "freelancing for video game companies such as NCSoft and doing tons of RPG illustrations." This suits JP perfectly: "I enjoy the RPG publishing market. I find the content to be a lot looser in art direction than novels or video game art."

And when you feel your work, it's easier to produce something truly exiting. Or as JP puts it: "Dig deep inside and rip it out." Sounds painful but he's not in a joking mood: "Seriously. I try to do images as if I were a fan who just wanted to see something really different or powerful."

The artist in this case has a responsibility to his audience. "It's like when you go to a movie and you have certain expectations, so I try to be that fan with those high expectations." The goal is to live up to – or even exceed – those expectations. "If I disappoint myself then I feel I've let down everyone looking at the image."

All this bodes well for JP's future plans: "I want to make my own line of graphic novels and hopefully pitch them to film makers and video game makers." He adds, with admirable humility: "I'm rarely an artist but I'm always a storyteller." ●

ARTIST TIP

BE YOURSELF
One of the things I try to tell up-and-coming fantasy illustrators, or artists in general, is to be yourself. Don't mimic your heroes' art, only mimic their work ethics and successes, but not their work. If you're going to do your own brand of fantasy art, do it like no other. Put your mark on the genre by being as raw and original as possible.

HIGH AND MIGHTY

❝ Dig deep inside and rip it out. I try to do images as if I were a fan who just wanted to see something really different or powerful ❞

Workshop
DARK PAINTING

JP Targete shows you how to create a dark fantasy painting by taking you step-by-step through his piece The Purifier, from the initial idea to those finishing touches.

Photoshop

JOURNEY INTO DARK FANTASY PAINTING

JP Targete shows you how to create a dark fantasy painting by taking you step-by-step through his piece The Purifier

Artist PROFILE

JP Targete

COUNTRY: US
CLIENTS: NCSoft, The Gnomon Workshop, Wizards of The Coast

JP is an accomplished digital and traditional illustrator, concept artist and art director for books and video games with 17 years experience. He's been providing illustration and concept art for book and RPG publishers, video games and production companies, and is presently working on a full-colour graphic novel. He currently resides in southern California with his wife and son.
www.targeteart.com

Try it yourself
For all the files you need, visit www.imaginefx.com and click on Downloads. For a trial of Photoshop, visit www.adobe.com

What's the difference between dark fantasy and regular old fantasy, you might ask. Well, it's not the obvious, which is, it doesn't actually have to be a literally dark image or have a muted colour palette. It does, however, require a sense of mystery, obscurity or a threatening mood of pending or present fear visualised in the image. What makes dark fantasy art distinct is that it introduces an element of reality to the viewer's visual experience that is different than the typical fantasy. It should appeal to them or make them feel uneasy. Let's face it, many of us like to be scared or surprised and dark fantasy should do this.

So when I was asked to host a workshop, I chose my favourite genre: dark fantasy. I find it interesting and enjoyable to play with, and it keeps me engrossed from start to finish. I enjoy simplicity in concept and idea, but I love all the technical details and processes needed to give life to those ideas too.

In this workshop, I'll start with a simple idea in thumbnail form and develop it into a drawing that we'll evolve into a fully detailed, coloured illustration using Photoshop CS2. There is more than one technique and tool in Photoshop to get the results we want.

I'll go over the techniques and tools I use, as well as discussing the ideas and concepts behind The Purifier. We'll also look at painting, colour, lighting, surface materials and detailing. This workshop is for artists who have a basic to good understanding of Photoshop.

1 Birth of an idea
For this first step I use pencil and paper and start sketching to fuel my ideas. When I first start sketching I don't have a clear idea of what I want to draw; all I know is that I want to create a powerful character either in battle or just standing in an 'I'll kick your ass' pose. As I continue to sketch, I find myself straying away from the more action-orientated thumbnails because I've done many battle-type paintings in the past.
I choose to do the more iconic posed character in sketch four, above – the character holding the axe. This will enable me to focus on the single character, details and background decor.

2 Develop a line drawing
I take my raw thumbnail and develop it into a line drawing. I then scan it at about 10x13 inches at 200dpi and tweak it in Photoshop. Try to get as much detail in the shapes and anatomy at this stage because it will save you a lot of grief later on. The Purifier is a cursed lord from the underworld who travels between our world and his. He purifies people through pain and eventually death, enabling their souls to be set free and collected. The object on his back is a dark magic soul-collecting mechanism.

3 Colourise your line art
Colourising will merge your line art with your painting, and the coloured line can be easier to deal with than the black-and-white line when it comes to painting over it. There are several ways to colourise. One is using the Variations function under Image>Adjust. Here you can see variations of your image and change the colour of the overall image quickly by clicking the desired colour. ➤➤

Workshops

4 Lay a ground colour

As I mentioned in step two, your line work should be bold and clear because you will now use it as a top layer and lay a colour ground underneath it in another layer. So create another layer under your line drawing. Change the layer setting of your line drawing to Multiply, and go back to the layer underneath. Go to your RGB colour slider and set it to this: R 110, G 102, B 117. Take the Paint Bucket tool in the toolbar and click into the empty layer. This is to create a colour and value ground that we will add highlights and shadows to.

5 Filters are your friends

Many artists don't like using filters in their work, which is fine, but I like to use as many as I can. My favourite filter is the Grain filter, found in the Filters menu under Texture>Grain. By adding texture to your ground layer you will simulate real media, such as paper or a grainy painting surface. Settings in the Grain filter should be set to Grain Type Clumped, with an Intensity of 39 and Contrast of 50. The filter will add small, coloured grainy particles to your image, which will help it to look more natural.

6 The mighty Dodge tool

The Dodge tool gets a bad rap in Photoshop because many users tend to misuse it, making it obvious that the tool was used in the image. If used properly, Dodge is a powerful tool. Here I use the Dodge tool to add highlights to my ground colour. This is similar to adding white chalk on grey paper. The Dodge tool does not erase or paint over the grain texture, so the texture stays intact as I add highlights. This is known as 'backward painting', because in art school we are taught to start with our darks and shadows first and finish up with highlights. I find the backward method easier for me when I put in basic highlights. It's important to know what direction your lighting will be coming from, and from how many light sources.

7 Adding darker values

Now that I have my highlights, I can start to add shadows and some values to my ground colour. I like to use the pre-made Oil brush in Photoshop. It's not as smooth as the regular Round brush, but not as hard as the Pencil or Hard brush. I set the brush setting to Darken and apply dark colours like markers, keeping areas somewhat translucent. I try to work very quickly in this step and really focus on shadows, values and form.

PRO SECRETS

Thumbs up

One of the key points in the thumbnail stage is to do as many as you can and keep them loose, focusing really on composition and value. Lighting, rendering and so on should be minimal at this stage. Thumbs and sketches are the raw essentials to creating a finished illustration.
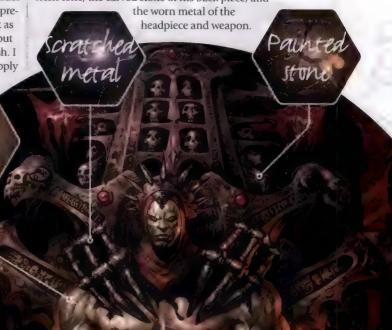
8 Apply the Lighting Effects filter

The Lighting Effects filter under Filter >Render is extremely useful for painting in Photoshop. It should be used to help establish quick, broad lighting and colour set-up in your image. I've set up a cream-coloured spotlight for my main light source and two omni red/orange lights for my edge and background light source, which represent flames. By previewing your image you can move the lighting around and see how it affects your image.

9 Establishing your surface materials

Before we continue it is important to establish the surface materials of the elements in the painting. If a viewer cannot distinguish flesh from stone or metal in your work, your image is getting further away from realism. Just like a 3D modeller who will create textures for their 3D renderings, a 2D artist needs to establish a materials library. For The Purifier, there are four main surface materials: chipped, painted stone of the arch decor; the character's flesh tone; the carved stone of his back piece; and the worn metal of the headpiece and weapon.

12 Love your skulls

As I continue painting I get carried away with painting the skulls. There's nothing so raw and primordial as a skull of an animal or human. It's this basic, visual chunk of reality that seeps into dark fantasy that makes it so appealing to me.

10 Merge layers, start painting

Once you know what materials go where, you can merge your drawing and ground layers and start painting on top of that layer or on a new layer. I roughly start to paint with my oils and Soft brush with warm colours. Notice how some of the ground colour is showing through.

11 Blocking in the background

Painting more transparently, I roughly block in the background, leaving bits of the ground colour to show through. I paint in the flames very quickly; they'll be refined later on. I've also started rendering the character's back piece, keeping in mind the materials it's made out of and how light will affect it.

PRO SECRETS

Material world

Mastering surface materials in painting is a key component that will help you develop a believable world. The greatest mistake that many aspiring painters make is that they do not have a wide range of established materials in their paintings. Many objects in their image, from flesh to leather to metal, seem to have the exact same specular properties. Once an artist has control of surface materials, the possibilities of application are endless.

13 Back to the background

I go back and forth from background to foreground and middle ground many times. In this step, I work up the right arch decor and the flames a little more, keeping in mind the material they're made of. I also flesh out the character's lower body. Notice the difference in materials from the cloth below his waist and the metal piece on his abdomen.

14 Arch headpiece

For the arch centre headpiece I want three degrees of light: ambient lighting that shows the form, a dominant

main light source and secondary under-lighting emitting from the bottom flame. For the left side of the arch decor I copy and flip the right side and repaint it with the proper lighting.

15 Texturing the arch

Using a custom-made Texture brush I add small speckles to the arch's surface, which adds a realistic, stone-like texture to it. ➤➤

16 Add smoke
On a separate layer I paint smoke in the background with a custom Cloud brush I created. This brush serves many purposes, from clouds to smoke and fog.

17 Erasing areas of smoke
With the Eraser tool I carefully erase the smoke areas where I want to show the foreground elements in the layer beneath.

18 Unsharp Mask
After applying final touches, I use the Unsharp Mask filter (under Filter >Sharpen) to bring out some of the details of the painting. Always create a duplicate layer of the layer you want to apply the filter to, because you can always erase parts you don't want.

19 The promised land
After looking at the image I realise I painted it literally too dark, and I need to pump up the highlights in certain areas. I use the levels sliders under Image> Adjustments>Levels and my friend the Dodge tool to bring out the highlights. And so The Purifier is finished. But his reign of terror lives on… ●

🇺🇸 Peter C Lee
LOCATION: US
WEB: www.peterconcept.com
EMAIL: peterconcept@yahoo.com
SOFTWARE: Photoshop CS2
JOB: Concept Artist, Blizzard Entertainment

"When I first played Star Craft," recalls Peter, "I realised I wanted to make cool games. That's when I started to dream of becoming a concept artist."

A graduate of the Art Center College of Design in California, Peter learned his trade the traditional way. "But, once I was introduced to digital art, there was no turning back." Peter was most impressed by the freedom: "I loved the limitless way of painting."

Now a concept artist for Blizzard Entertainment – home of the Warcraft universe – Peter is a confirmed SF fan. "I caught the bug after seeing Ridley Scott's movies," he says. Now SF projects are a favourite, "because I can use my imagination without limitation."

1 MAGICAL MOMENT This robot was being shipped on a cargo ship. "But his safety lock was broken and he fell into the jungle. On seeing nature for the first time, this little robot is in shock."

2 PIRATE SHIP IN THE STORM "I always wanted to create an image about pirates," grins Peter. Surprisingly, painting the sea was fun: "Water was a hard subject, but I learned a lot."

Justin Kaufman, aka Coro

LOCATION: US
WEB: www.coro36ink.com
EMAIL: coro@massiveblack.com
SOFTWARE: Photoshop, 3ds max
JOB: Concept artist and 2D art director at Massive Black

"I learned to love making art running around El Paso, Texas with spray cans in the middle of the night," Coro confesses. But before long, "I found myself spending more and more time in my black books, messing with inks, coloured pencils, and anything else I could get my hands on."
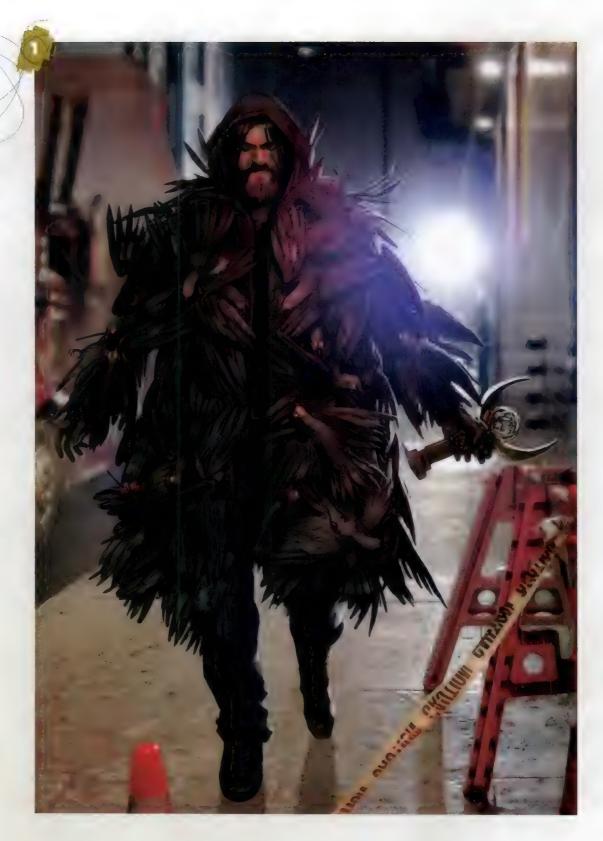
Upon leaving art school, it was straight into the games industry for Coro. "I was lucky enough to cut my teeth as a production artist at a small studio called Shaba Games, drawing concepts, making 3D models, texturing, lighting, and anything else they would let me try my hand at. After four years of working there, I helped start a company called Massive Black with some fellow artists."

Living in San Francisco, with his "best half", Melissa, Coro is in an enviable position. "I feel very fortunate," he says, "to be where I am right now, working with the most talented bunch of people I have ever met, and being able to practise what I love to do. Hopefully I can continue to draw, paint, and maybe if I'm really lucky, at some point, discover the eternal truths of this art thing."

1 BUM SERIES 1 "I've been working on a bunch of stuff for this crazy homeless bum series," explains Coro. "He's like a mystical badass dude who wears a coat of pigeons. He has an old trophy as a weapon. He likes it because it has wings."

2 UNDERWATER SCENE "I hadn't painted an underwater scene in a long time, and wanted to try to make one up."

FXPosé
SHOWCASING PROFESSIONAL FANTASY ARTISTS

🇺🇸 **Jeremy Dylan Mohler**
LOCATION: US
WEB: www.jeremymohler.com
EMAIL: jer@jeremymohler.com
SOFTWARE: Adobe Photoshop CS
JOB: Freelance illustrator, owner/art director of Baeg Tobar (www.baegtobar.com), art director at Empty Room Studios (www.emptyroomstudios.com)

"I didn't always intend to get into digital art," says Jeremy. Indeed, for him, traditional methods were, for a long time, the only way of working. "However, I was finding that with traditional painting, I was losing too much of my line drawing to thick paint."
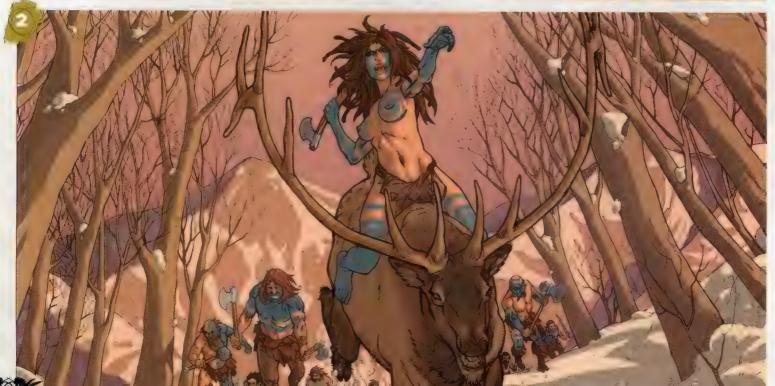
Feeling that line art was one of the strongest aspects of his work, Jeremy began looking for ways to keep hold of it while still adding colour. "I started working with Photoshop more and more, because I could work the colour under the line drawing while still retaining an emphasis on both."

1 ETHERSCOPE – THE GREAT METROPOLIS For this cover, Goodman Games wanted to show a dynamic action scene featuring a Victorian-type character with a cybernetic adaptation. "I thought an upshot would be interesting," says Jeremy, "so I worked out the three-point perspective on paper first and then scanned that in to colour digitally."

2 SEVEN SAXONS The focus for this Bad Axe Games cover was to be a witch riding an elk into battle. "I decided that instead of showing the character and her followers in battle it would be more interesting to have them coming directly at whoever was looking at the cover – almost leaping off it at anybody who might pass by the game on the rack."

🇨🇦 Michael Chomicki

LOCATION: Canada
WEB: www.studioqube.com
EMAIL: mail@studioqube.com
SOFTWARE: Photoshop and Painter
JOB: Illustrator and concept artist

"Ever since I was a kid," says Mike, "I always enjoyed drawing." But it was only in his final years of high school that he discovered his inspiration: "Japanese anime, 3D film, European graphic design and electronic music."

Born in Gdansk, Poland, Mike moved with his family to Canada when he was still a young boy. Now a graduate of the illustration and computer animation programs at Sheridan College, "I have been slowly working at developing a studio, mainly focusing on illustration, graphic design, and concept work of all sorts."

Inspired by contemporary Japanese and Korean artwork, "I've lately been applying myself to anything from character design to background and mechanical design."

1 LITTLE RED A Little Red Riding Hood spin-off: "I wanted to depict the wolf as a black, shadowy, almost spirit-like entity. Little Red, on the other and, I wanted to feel a bit more classical and iconic, almost like a 'Lady Liberty' sort of approach."

2 BLOOM Mike's approach on this image was a lot more illustrative: "I wanted show the passing of winter into spring, hence the overall cool colour scheme, contrasted by the Sakura flowers and budding vines."

🇺🇸 Jeff Haynie

LOCATION: US
WEB: www.jeffhaynie.com
EMAIL: j.haynie@comcast.net
SOFTWARE: Photoshop
JOB: Concept artist, Surreal Software

For as long as he can remember, Jeff Haynie has painted pictures of fantasy worlds, spaceships and creatures. His passion for creating these images led him to a career in art and illustration.

By applying traditional art principles to digital media, "I've found a whole new world of possibilities to create artwork," says Jeff. This approach has opened the door into the gaming industry, where he has worked as an art director and concept artist for companies including DreamWorks Interactive and THQ.

Jeff has worked on titles including Medal of Honor, Clive Barker's Undying, Need for Speed Hot Pursuit 2, and Evil Dead Regeneration. His art has also been published by major corporations such as Disney, Pixar and Warner Brothers in the world of film, and others including American Airlines, Texas Instruments, Pepsi and IBM. He's a busy man!

1 BULLSEYE "This painting depicts my favourite alien pet from Mars," says Jeff. "It reflects all of the dogs and cats I've had, all wrapped up into one creature." And what a strange beast!

2 EVIL DEAD REGENERATION Hero shot illustration of the characters from Evil Dead Regeneration, the PS2 and XBox game.

Mike Mignola

He's best known as the creator of his "silly little character" Hellboy, but this talented artist and writer has many more strings to his bow...

I never really seriously thought about drawing comics – I just didn't think I was that kind of artist," says Mike Mignola. That might sound like graceful false modesty coming from the creator of Hellboy and a man whose work is admired by thousands of artists across the globe.

But Mike, it transpires, is not only refreshingly honest about his own abilities, but also articulate and friendly. Not to mention busy: with the Hellboy 2 film in development, along with a series of animated versions of his most well-known creation

and a couple of other personal projects on the back burner, he remains remarkably calm.

LATE STARTER

Unusually, Mike wasn't as huge a comic fan as you might expect him to have been during his childhood, drifting in and out of love with them. He did, however, harbour a great fascination with all things supernatural, as well as monsters. It was only after finishing art school and when "it was time to decide how to make a living drawing monsters" that he decided he'd better get serious and get himself a job.

After a rather tenuous start as a "really bad" inker at Marvel in ➤➤

HELLBOY
Created almost on a whim, Mike's little devil has proven to be his most popular character by far.

66 I spent time designing him so he'd be fun to draw, and Hellboy was the only name I ever came up with 99

BEGINNINGS
An early sketch from 1997, when Mike was still defining the character and his universe.

LEGEND

CHRISTMAS
There has always been an element of dark humour to the Hellboy strip...

NAZI
Hellboy often battled Nazis in earlier tales (and also in the film), but these days Mike is moving away from that area.

MIGNOLA

MOODY
Mike admits to constantly changing the way he renders characters, even now.

ORIGINAL
This is the very first incarnation of Hellboy, which Mike sketched for a comics convention book.

1982, for the next 10 years or so Mike flitted between Marvel and DC working on various projects such as Thor, Batman and Cosmic Odyssey. "I didn't think of trying to steer my career in any particular direction, I just did whatever seemed fun at the time," he adds. "It was five or six years before I thought I began to know what I was doing."

HELLBOY IS BORN

In 1993, he was due to attend a comic convention, and the organisers asked him for a drawing to feature in the convention book. "So rather than draw Batman or Wolverine or whatever the hell I was doing at the time, I just drew a monster," he says. "There was a space on his belt, and I wrote 'Hellboy'. I just thought it was funny and didn't think any more about it."

At least, not until a few years later, when he started to play with the idea of creating his own character and stories – a trend which had recently surfaced in the industry. "I knew my first impulse would have been to create a regular, normal, human guy who's

an occult detective; but I also knew I'd get bored drawing a regular person all the time.

"So I went back to that first monster drawing and thought, instead of a regular person, what if I do a guy that looks like the devil, as an occult detective? I spent a lot of time designing him so he'd be fun to draw, and the name Hellboy was literally the only one that I ever came up with."

Mike's fears that his project would come to nothing were baseless, and the first mini-series, Hellboy: The Seeds of Destruction, set the scene for Hellboy's bizarre world to be expanded in further series and one-offs. The red-skinned one took a leap into the mainstream with the 2004 release of the eponymous film, directed by Guillermo del Toro and co-written by Mike.

"One of my main hopes was that the film would introduce more people to Hellboy," he says, and that certainly was the case. "Suddenly your silly little character is known worldwide… It's strange. When you get those kind of numbers from all over seeing the film, it's pretty weird.

AN ABSURD EXERCISE
How Mike developed his own unique style

Mike's recent work includes The Amazing Screw-On Head, a bizarre stream-of-consciousness comic (and later animation) that's also very funny. "People say there's not much of a plot, and indeed there is no plot. It's an absurd exercise in visuals, almost with the pictures driving the plot. I just did it for me."

Despite his own reservations about his working methods, Mike's style is hard to pin down – particularly outside of the Hellboy work. "In high school I wanted to be Frank Frazetta," he says. "I learned a lot from copying him. I went through phases where I wanted to be a zillion different guys, and then I discovered Bernie Wrightson. That was like my second big life-changing thing."

Eventually, he believes, he developed his own style one way or another, one which can't be easily traced to any artist in particular. "People look at my work and they don't know who I'm influenced by, which I like."

SWORD OF STORMS

Hellboy gets animated...

Sword of Storms, the first animated Hellboy film, is out now on DVD. And this is no cheap remake of the live-action film; again, this is a collaboration between Mike and Guillermo del Toro, and features a strong line-up of the original cast from the movie.

The plot of this fantastical animated adventure, directed by Tad Stones and Phil Weinstein, sees Hellboy facing his usual adversaries in the shape of various other-worldly nasties, as he attempts to rescue a professor who's been possessed by demons. It's a film that not only bears all the hallmarks of the del Toro live-action version, but has a distinct flavour of stylised Japanese animation as well, complete with manga-style monsters. The end result is a film that blends the essence of the original comic book with that of the live-action movie to great effect. Sword of Storms, certificate PG, is available from Anchor Bay (**www.anchorbayentertainment.com**) and costs £15.

ANIMATED
The animated universe of Hellboy is intentionally different from that of both the comics and the film.

MOOD
"People look at my work and they don't know why I'm enthused by which I like" says Mike.

"I was feeling the pressure even before the film. When you know more people are noticing what you do, you're always thinking, oh my god, they're expecting something – as opposed to, well, I'll surprise them. So then I start worrying every time I pick up a pencil: 'If I do this wrong, I'll have ended my career'," he laughs.

SECOND COMING

He's currently working with del Toro on Hellboy 2, set for release in 2008, as well as on the second animated film (the first, Sword of Storms, is out on DVD now – see above). Thus the Hellboy franchise is sucking up most of his time. But even without these projects to keep him busy, Mike feels his days of drawing huge mini-series are behind him. "I'm too slow and I've got too many things I want to do, so some of these big projects I've had in mind for years I'll do with different artists."

Hiring other artists to realise Mike's ideas is a decision that's bound to displease many fans, but he sees no alternative. "I've become very anal about design and about storytelling and about this and that... It's very difficult for me to draw something without analysing how it works as a storytelling thing, and how it relates to other

stuff. It's become almost like this complex maths problem when I draw – I'm so conscious of what I'm doing. It makes for interesting work, but a *lot* of spontaneity is gone – and I don't know how to get that back.

"So I have to make the decision that either this book never happens, or it happens with another artist. It's hard to let go of that stuff, but I want to get the stories out there. You'd never get the comics otherwise."
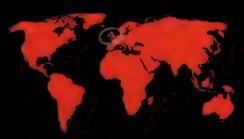
IS IT A MONSTER?

Famously, Mike once said, "All I want to do is draw monsters." Is that still true? "I think I would change it to monsters and old houses. I would love to do a string of paintings of old buildings. None of them would be bright, sunny, happy houses; they would be dark, creepy things with rotting wood. It's not like I want to sit there and draw Frankenstein all day long, but I like a certain kind of atmosphere. Del Toro got bitten by the same bug as I did at an early age, when for some reason your ideas work better when they're cut loose from reality. I have so little interest in the real world."

He pauses, trying to sum it all up, before adding dryly: "I like making shit up."

66 It's not like I want to draw Frankenstein all day long, but I like a certain kind of atmosphere 99

WONDERCON
Hellboy presides over the cover for WonderCon's tenth anniversary program book, alongside some other familiar faces...

MIGNOLA
3 96 6

Reader FXPosé

NEXT STOP ON OUR TOUR: THE UNITED KINGDOM

Finnian Clark
LOCATION: England
WEB: Larkin2.deviantart.com
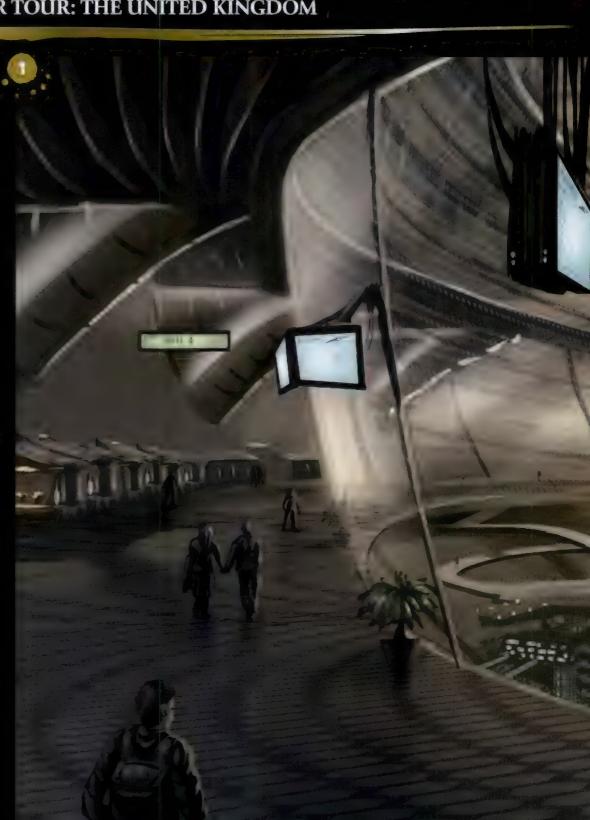EMAIL: my-private-nation @ hotmail.com
SOFTWARE: Photoshop CS2

Finnian has been interested in digital art since the age of 10, when he spent a lot of time browsing through online galleries, wondering how it was done. And then he had an epiphany. "When I discovered concept art I became much more motivated, and in 2005 I tried digital art for the first time," he says. The imaginative scenes created by concept artists proved a real inspiration. "I believe that a good picture is as much about the idea as the way it is achieved," Finnian adds. "I try to do some art every day as I want to improve my skills and develop my own artistic style." So what does the future hold for this young artist? "I'm still exploring my options, but I think I may take a degree in illustration, and later do some art in the film industry."

1 SPACE PORT "I wanted to try to create a scene where the characters fit into their environment," Finnian says. "I sketched it using a hard brush, applied textures and then used a Spattered Smudge brush to smooth down some of the surfaces."

2 TRIPOD Created using custom brushes after Finnian watched David Levy's Concept Art DVD.

3 JET "This was a practice piece that I drew with pencil, scanned and rendered in Photoshop," says Finnian. Again, he took his inspiration from an artist's video workshop. "I learned how to do perspective form drawing by looking at Scott Robertson's DVDs," he tells us.

Shuo Li

LOCATION: England
WEB: None at present
EMAIL: grass422@hotmail.com
SOFTWARE: Photoshop CS

As an international student, Shuo Li recently graduated from Bournemouth University. He's pretty low-key about his approach, saying: "Honestly, there is no special technique in my works. I just scanned in my sketch then use Photoshop to colour it."

His work is influenced "by manga and fantasy art. And I'm trying to find a way to make my works have some oriental feeling too." There's much still to be learned, however: "Because I don't have a strong background in traditional illustration or painting, I'm still trying to improve my skill."

1 THE MOON Two mermaids sing by the open sea under a full moon. "The Moon is everything."

2 THE LOVERS The two lovers kiss beneath a wisteria tree. "I'm trying to create a warm feeling around the two main characters."

Jason Walsh

LOCATION: Wales
WEB: teemunkle.deviantart.com
EMAIL: jason_walsh@btinternet.com
SOFTWARE: Painter IX and Photoshop 7

Jason has been painting digitally for about three years now. "I got into it from watching DVD concept art extras on my favourite films."

The artwork that goes into these films really impressed Jason, "especially films such as Star Wars, where everything on screen has been conceptualised."

Although he used to draw a lot at school, Jason hadn't drawn a thing in years. "But when I saw how cool the artwork looked and how it was created digitally, I bought myself a Wacom tablet and started to mess about with Painter and Photoshop."

Training himself, with the time-honoured methods of trial, error and magazine workshops, "I learn a lot every time I get a new magazine and plug in my Wacom." Jason recently joined the online art community DeviantArt, where he continues to learn from his peers. "It was a real confidence boost to show people my work," he says.

And the great news is, "I've been asked to do some computer game work, designing weapons and spacecraft. It was a real buzz to get something from my imagination on to a digital canvas and have many people enjoying it."

1 HEADGEARS "I love to draw mechanical stuff," says Jason, "Especially robots." Chrome robots are the crème de la crème. "The engravings on the head are like tattoos but for machines."

2 IRON MAN A quick painting in Painter, inspired by Iron Man comics and the recent movie. "I quite like Steampunk stuff, so I made him look less glossy, darker and less high-tech."

IFX INSIGHT
"I love the idea of robots having tattoos laser-etched on to their metal. It adds much-needed character to what otherwise would be a cold and slightly creepy machine."
Tom Rudderham, DVD Editor

🏴󠁧󠁢󠁥󠁮󠁧󠁿 Joe Nevin
LOCATION: England
WEB: Site in development
EMAIL: joenevin@btinternet.com
SOFTWARE: Painter, Photoshop

A long time ago Joe did traditional painting at art school, but all was not well. "I found that it was a case of diminishing returns for increasing effort. Then recently I was trying to sort out some images in Photoshop and decided to mess around with the brushes.

"I am not 'pro' or 'anti' digital art," says Joe. "In fact, I think the whole thing is a non-question." When art is produced in order to be reproduced, "then it's of no consequence whether it was generated by oils, oils and Photoshop, or even Photoshop alone.

"Since what I'm interested in is more like illustration or storytelling," adds Joe, "there seems to be less resistance to generating images in this way." Another curiosity that Joe's noticed, however, is that there's a more democratic atmosphere around this 'new art'.

"Perhaps this is because there's no longer a dependence on galleries or other 'gatekeepers' to get your work out there," Joe suggests. "Who knows!" Perhaps the most surprising element is the refreshing, friendly co-operation from so many other digital artists – "what a lot of people expected to find at art school but didn't", Joe adds.

1 DOOMED! "Some people just see the downside in every situation."

2 FUNKY BATTLE "This is the grimy reality of aliens fighting in the East End of Glasgow – scary."

3 THAT SINKING FEELING "Time slows down and is elastic in the moment before things start to go very, very wrong."

🏴 Matthew Allsopp

LOCATION: England
WEB: www.matthewallsopp.com
EMAIL: matt.allsopp@gmail.com
SOFTWARE: Painter IX

"I've always had a strong passion for art," says Matt, "but it wasn't until I discovered concept art for film and game that I knew it would be my future career."

Matt was picked up by the director of StormRider films during his final college presentation, and the project he's currently working on is a sci-fi film called Kaleidoscope Man. "I agreed to produce some art to help raise funding, and two years down the line I'm still producing environmental and vehicle designs as well as storyboards and matte paintings for the film."

The whole thing has been an amazing experience and a huge test for Matt: "Tight hourly deadlines for key shots have been the biggest test, and the biggest self-improvement. It's not been a walk in the park, but it's not often people can go to work and do what they love."

1 INFILTRATION POINT Originally beginning as a very loose thumbnail that focused upon the cone shape city backdrop, "I blew the thumbnail up and began developing it further. A few hours later I ended up with this."

2 BRODIE IN JAPAN This piece is for promotional prints backing up the comic Brodie's Law, from Pulp Theatre Entertainment. "I'm not a huge fan of airbrushed work," he says, "so I use as many textured brushes as possible."

3 TREE HOUSE This piece is a classic example of how Matt focuses on composition, design and colour over detail or texture: "Hopefully this is something you might want to hang on your wall," he quips.

Lawerence Etherington

LOCATION: England
WEB: www.studioblinktwice.com
EMAIL: lorenzo@studioblinktwice.com
SOFTWARE: Photoshop

"All the images presented here have been produced for the comic book work of Studio Blink Twice," explains Lawrence. "The company illustrates the range of titles that I work on."

Having studied fine art sculpture, Lawrence has an understanding of 3D design, "which enables me to create complex sprawling worlds."

Lawrence's work on MOON!, the forthcoming 'space opera epic', has led to an enormous amount of invention, "from the smallest details right up to entire planets and hundreds of different alien characters."

1 MOON BUGGY "Produced as promotional work for an interview with our studio on **indiespinnerrack. com**, this picture features a limited palette to really help the key characters in the Moon Buggy 'pop' visually.

2 GLADIATOR Drawn for an online Sketch Battle for **Eatpoo.com**: "The flames along the bottom of the image were sketched by hand, and then re-drawn using the Photoshop Pen tool."

3 DRAGON SLEDGING For this Malcolm Magic cover, Lawrence drew the characters in pencil before scanning into Photoshop and colouring. "I then painted loose shapes of trees and snow, and applied varying degrees of angled motion blur to give the camera depth of field and focus."

Tales OF THE TEAROOM

Ooops...

http://vauxhaulastra.deviantart.com

http://vauxhaulastra.deviantart.co...

Reader EXPosé
THE PLACE TO SHARE YOUR DIGITAL ART

Holly Jameson
LOCATION: Northern Ireland
WEB: http://vauxhaulastra.deviantart.com
EMAIL: holly200@hotmail.co.uk
SOFTWARE: Photoshop 7, Photoshop Elements 3.0, DAZ|Studio, Flash MX 2004, Terragen, Apophysis

Holly first became interested in digital art "when my mother demonstrated how to colour one of my drawings with the old copy of Photoshop Limited Edition we had."

It wasn't much of an image, says Holly, "just a constipated-looking ginger cat for a school project. But from then on, my interest in digital art has grown."

In 2004 the Jamesons' family computer met its maker, "and soon I was blessed with a computer that had a version of Photoshop that worked." Holly wasted no time: "I have been creating digital art at a high pace since my virtual mates on bbc.co.uk/dna/h2g2 directed me to deviantart.com. Here I have made a home for myself, my friends encouraging me and spurring me on to greater heights."

Holly's preferred form is manga, "but I also make fractals, comics, Flash animations, landscapes and 3D art." She's a great all-rounder: "I'm happy doing this and it is definite that my future career will involve digital art."

1 TEAROOM FIRE This piece illustrates a comical event from a conversation forum on h2g2, where Holly is a community artist. "We set the Tearoom on fire and eventually EvilClaw (the cat-man in the picture) blew the place up..."

2 MERMAID OF THE MEDITERRANEAN One of Holly's most popular works. "I am proud of the tail and hair."

3 IMAGINEFX CONTEST "For a contest in my favourite mag."

Michael James Newlyn
LOCATION: England
WEB: http://uk.geocities.com/stargazer_1988
EMAIL: stargazer_1988@yahoo.co.uk
SOFTWARE: Bryce, Vue, Terragen, Paintshop Pro, Poser, DAZ|Studio 1.0

Mike has been interested in science fiction and fantasy since he was a boy. "I started out designing science fiction images at about 15," when, he recalls, "the pictures were drawn by hand, using pencil, ink and airbrush."

Next came a fascination with computers and design. "Starting with Paintshop Pro 7, I made my first digital designs four years ago. Then I discovered packages such as Bryce."

Mike's father was an artist who specialised in oils, and was clearly a big influence on Mike: "He was a very good architect and drew plans for houses that he also built with my grandfather." Other influences include Rodney Matthews, Jim Burns and Tim White. "My partner Elaine is a great inspiration too," Mike adds.

1 CITY OF ANGELS Inspired by such things as Atlantis and the holy golden cities. "This is where all the most beautiful of angels live."

2 DUCATI RIDER 2076 Created with a combination of Vue 4, Cinema 4D and Paint Shop Pro. "This bike gives an idea of what maybe bikes will look like 60 years down the line and beyond."

3 JUN Inspired by Japanese fantasy fighting games such Soul Calibur, "Jun is training in the most raging and bleak of all storms to gain her experience."

Daniel Rossiter
LOCATION: England
WEB: http://knight1.cgsociety.org
EMAIL: danielrossiter@sky.com
SOFTWARE: Photoshop

From books to video games, "I've always been deeply involved in some sort of project," says Daniel. "I would spend hours after school and on the weekends producing sketch after sketch." A day without a doodle is a wasted day.

A talented traditional artist, Daniel was drawn to the digital medium by the flood of creativity coming from the sci-fi film and video game industry. At first this meant everything from 3D animation all the way to pixel art. However, he soon discovered he had a different calling. "I quickly found that I was returning with more excitement to the illustration and concept stage of the development."

Every new composition presents a difficult choice: "My love of technology and the future are as strong as my fascination with ancient mythologies, folklore and history."

Daniel hopes one day to become a full-time freelance illustrator/concept designer in either the film or video game industry.

1 THE ELITE Daniel's first digital painting using a tablet. "An elite soldier of the future, originally conceived as an idea for a short 3D animated film."
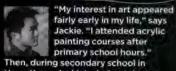
2 ANGEL IN THE DARKNESS Commissioned by a local band, Daniel's brief was to create an image that would reflect the group's move to a darker and heavier sound. "The image was kept in a layered format so that three different variations could be used in different parts of the album."

Jackie Wu Hing-Ki

LOCATION: England
WEB: www.geckokid.net
EMAIL: geckokid@gmail.com
SOFTWARE: Painter, Photoshop

"My interest in art appeared fairly early in my life," says Jackie. "I attended acrylic painting courses after primary school hours." Then, during secondary school in Hong Kong, Jackie's design talent was spotted by an art teacher. "He encouraged me to join the Wah Yan Path project, a major project of my school for which I designed a website."

Perhaps as a result of this encouragement, "I was more into graphics and design before really dipping into painting digitally in 2004." That was the year Jackie discovered Corel Painter. "My first Painter painting gave me a lot of confidence as it was very well received."

Jackie is now studying Multimedia Design in Northumbria University in Newcastle. He also has a great interest in photography and game design: "I consider myself more of a 'try everything' type."

1 FISHING IN THE CITY "I've had this idea for quite a few months," says Jackie, "of a sort of peaceful yet post-apocalyptic city scene. Of how life continues on without technology."

2 GIVE YOU MY HEART This is Jackie's first Painter creation. "I was having a heartbreak when I created the rough sketch. It's not intended to be photorealistic at all, but to portray how it feels when you're in love."

David Neaves
LOCATION: England
WEB: www.cauldronimages.co.uk
EMAIL: david.neaves@btinternet.com
SOFTWARE: Photoshop

A self-taught artist, David started painting seriously in his 20s. "I am now 60," he says. "So back then it was oils on the rough side of hardboard in order to get the effect of canvas." Still busy learning new techniques, "I find the best way of doing this is to study professionals."

The subjects were always figures and portraits and David did manage to sell a few. "But I had to stop painting to concentrate on my business." Then a few years ago David stumbled upon a book by Boris Vallejo, "and I was hooked again. My son persuaded me to buy a Mac and try painting using Photoshop, and this is still the only software I use."

New pictures start as an idea, before being sketched on to paper for scanning into Photoshop. David doesn't normally start with a story, "but each picture develops its own as I paint it and I become totally absorbed."

1 NL37 MY PET Taken from a series of strange people with strange pets. "This time the pet is a flightless legless dragon that moves like a snake and has a tail that can demolish castle walls."

2 NIGHT LIFE MARIA 2 Maria is a witch who wants to be a mermaid. "She lives in a ruin overlooking a bay that she guards jealously."

3 RONALD AND HIS CRYPT WORMS Another strange pet picture. "Ronald lives alone with his pets but is always grateful for some company."

4 GRACE This is a lady returning home in the early hours of the morning. "Grace is lost in thoughts of a better life."

Richard Johnston

LOCATION: England
WEB: http://richardj.deviantart.com
EMAIL: richardrevel@tiscali.co.uk
SOFTWARE: Photoshop, Painter, Particle Illusion

Richard comes from a "traditional creative background" and has worked in the film, TV, theatre and animation industries since he was 19. "My first job was at Spitting Image in 1988 helping to repair the satirical puppets," he says.

He has always loved imagination, character, story telling and animation. Put those elements together and what have you got? Ray Harryhausen, of course. "He was a big influence, and I think a lot of his work still stands up today," says Richard.

In recent years, though, computers have totally changed the creative world for Richard. "The Lord of the Rings was just completely amazing. I wanted to change my direction to start working more in the computer arena because of the amazing results," he says.

Some people might feel threatened by the inexorable march of technology, but not Richard: "I'm slowly adapting my traditional skills to the computer and I hope I can succeed soon!"

1 ICE MAIDEN Starting with photos of a live model, Richard created an ice tomb in Photoshop and Painter. "Unlike the Fire Lord, this is a sympathetic character. She has had a spell put on her and cannot touch anyone or they will be instantly frozen!"

2 OUTCAST This piece is based on a model Richard sculpted 10 years ago. "Using photos and Photoshop I wanted to give the impression of this character being a wanderer, not belonging to anywhere in particular."

IFX INSIGHT

"The tiger is the perfect choice to depict the ronin samurai. They are both proud loners, and utterly powerful, too. The outfit and sword are also historically correct."
Marcelo Furquim
Ex IFX Art Editor

Daniel Lopez
LOCATION: England
WEB: http://danlop77.cgsociety.org
EMAIL: danlopillustration@gmail.com
SOFTWARE: Photoshop

Now living in London, Daniel originally trained as a graphic designer in his native Colombia, where he worked for several advertising agencies, "but my true passion has always been illustration."

Daniel's chief source of entertainment has been paper and pencil ever since he can remember: "I love to draw dragons, creatures and any other fantasy characters, and I like to think of myself as a self-taught digital artist as I was introduced to graphic tablets only a year ago."

Daniel acknowledges he still has much to learn, "but that is exactly what I find so mind-blowing about digital art: the endless possibilities. The only limits are set by your own imagination. Every new Photoshop document is an opportunity to materialise what is going on in my head."

The immediate goal is collaboration: "I really would like to work as a concept artist in a company." Working with people on a similar wavelength would, Daniel believes, "set me on another creative level – I want to test and push my talent to the limit."

1 TUNDRA This one was a bit of fun. "I wanted to create a typical adverse, hostile environment... and a guy strong enough to wear very little in that kind of weather!"

2 PENITENT "I like to create stories behind my characters," says Daniel. "It charges me up during the sketching process." This character made some terrible mistake, "and not even his angelic credentials saved him from the punishment."

3 BOUNTY HUNTER This piece is the latest in a series of characters sharing one thing in common: "The integration of mechanical parts with flesh and organs."

John Walters
LOCATION: England
WEB: Currently in development
EMAIL: jtwdesigner@aol.com
SOFTWARE: Photoshop

Graduating in 2002 as a set designer, John has used Photoshop throughout his education and career. Three years ago John started using a Wacom tablet and, having provided his services as a graphic designer, model maker and sculptor, decided to follow his long-time passion for sketching and painting.
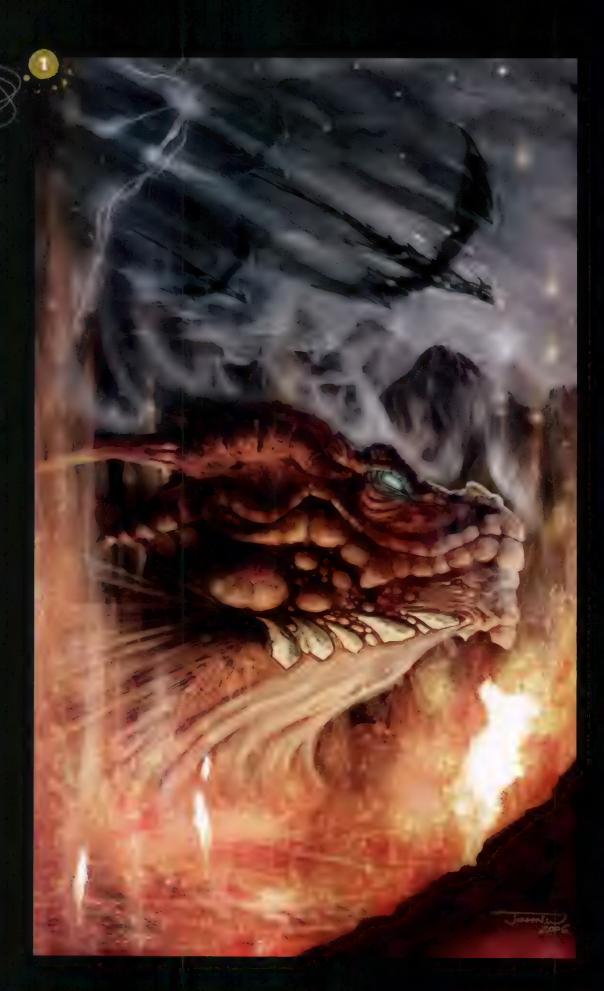
"I have developed so much as an artist through the use of Photoshop and graphics tablets," says John. "And now with the aid of ImagineFX, I can continue to grow."
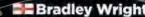
John has been a professional artist for four years now, working in the ever-changing creative industries with varied media and materials. "It's the best fun a 29-year-old kid can have," he enthuses.

DRAGON'S DAWN John has always taken a keen interest in dragons. "Here I've used photographs of real fire with a mixture of texture and painted flames. I was very pleased, as this became the very first piece of digital sci-fi/fantasy art I completed."

IFX INSIGHT

"As a first digital piece, this is just brilliant. The main dragon has a wisdom and gracefulness that really draws you into the image."
Rob Carney, Editor, IFX

Bradley Wright
LOCATION: Northern Ireland
EMAIL: bradtheman20@hotmail.com
SOFTWARE: Photoshop CS2, Painter

"I've always been into drawing," says Bradley, "but never thought of it as a career choice." So, wanting something creative to do, "I ended up along the graphic design route, which proved a little dull and unfulfilling."

That all changed when Bradley stumbled across such luminous online communities as ConceptArt.org. "This changed my entire way of thinking," he says, "and without sounding corny, changed my life."
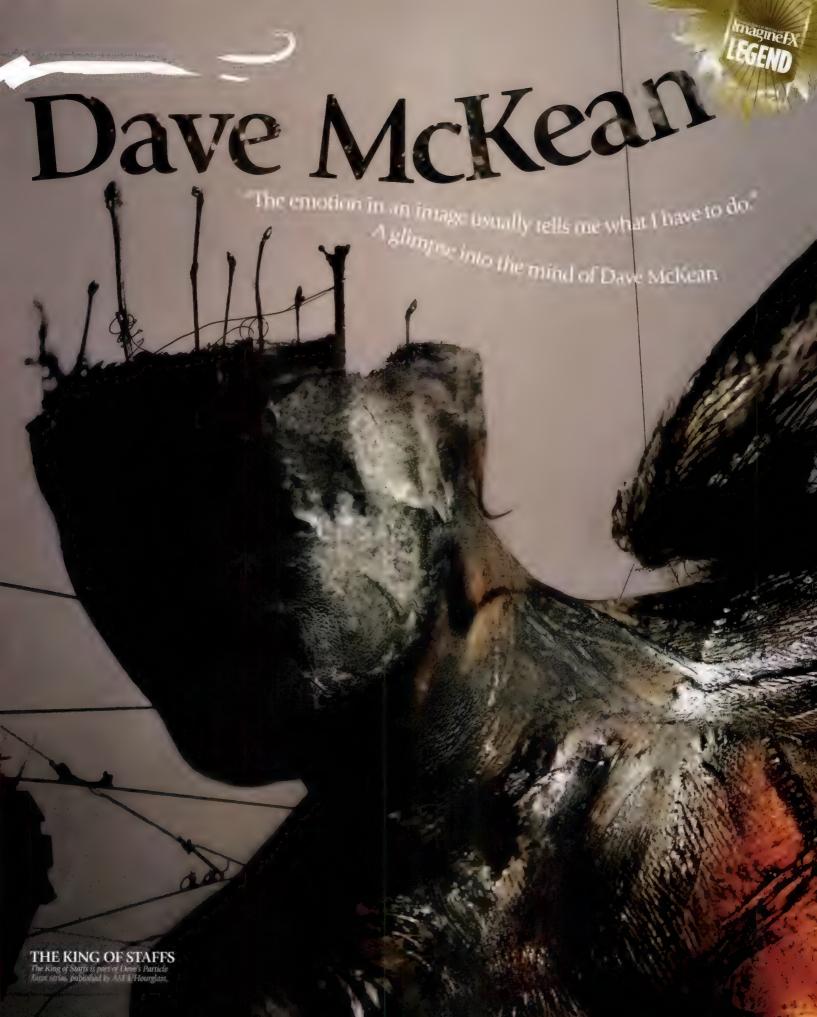
The possibility of achieving childhood dreams became a reality, "and although I haven't achieved much in my 'career' so far," says Bradley, "I'm very hopeful and excited about what the future will bring."
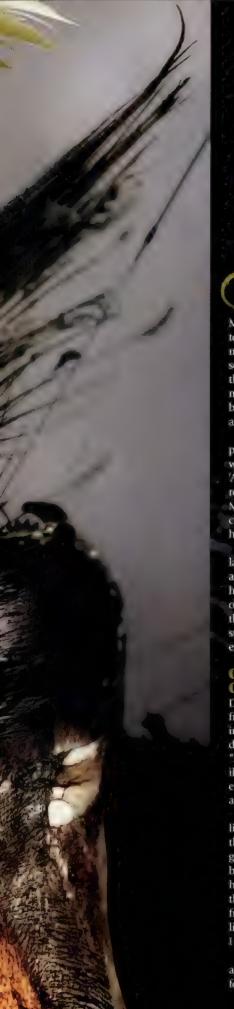
1 ORK A fun, fast image: "One of my childhood desires was to be a big mean ork."

2 OLD KNIGHT "Although I feel I should be doing more 'arty' and thought-provoking images," muses Bradley, "sometimes you've got to draw a big old knight on horseback."

IFX INSIGHT

"I'm very impressed with the details in the Ork, particularly all his piercings, and those vicious fingernails show he's not to be messed with."
Kay Inglis,
Production
Editor

Dave McKean

"The emotion in an image usually tells me what I have to do."
A glimpse into the mind of Dave McKean

THE KING OF STAFFS
The King of Staffs is part of Dave's Particle
Tarot series, published by A&E's Hourglass.

Asked about how he became an 'Artist', Dave McKean gives an interesting preface to his answer: "I've never thought of myself as an 'Artist'," he says. It's not so much the art that worries him, it's the capital A – it seems to claim too much, even for the man behind comic book legends including Sandman and Violent Cases.

"I draw and paint, make photographs, films and music, and I write occasionally." But he's not an 'Artist'. For Dave, that lofty title is reserved for the likes of Pablo Picasso, Max Ernst and Francis Bacon. "They created the language that I, and hundreds of others, try to use."
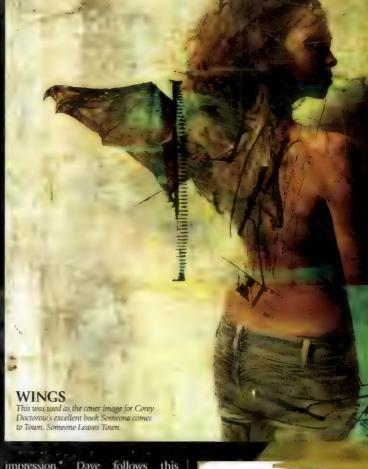
Dave's ambition is to make those languages come alive, to tell stories and to investigate experience. "I'm happy using these established ways of making images and pushing them," he says, "applying them to storytelling, and using them to explain and explore my interests."

GAINING SOME KIND OF FOUNDATION

Dave grew up in a village several miles from Maidenhead, a place which is in turn some miles from London. His dad was an important early influence: "My dad wasn't a professional illustrator, but he could draw, and entertained me by drawing caricatures and cartoons."

But sadly, this was to be a short-lived influence. "He was stuck in a job that he was very good at, came with great responsibility for a large staff, but utterly stifled any creativity in him, and ultimately killed him I think." There's nothing like stress and frustration to shorten the natural life span. "This lesson I learned when I was 12."

Before this, "We went to the Tate, and I got to see Max Ernst's paintings for the first time. These left a big

WINGS
This was used as the cover image for Corey Doctorow's excellent book Someone comes to Town, Someone Leaves Town.

impression." Dave follows this melancholic tone with a flash of colour: "I loved all the stuff boys love." That meant comics, "especially American comics, the weirder the better." It also meant film, especially horror and sci-fi. This love extended to illustrations for magazines including Amazing Stories and later New Worlds. For a while Patrick Woodroffe, Roger Dean, Philip Castle and Chris Foss all helped shape young Dave's imagination, "and much of this stuff has settled in my brain as some sort of foundation."

MUSICAL YOUTH

Although life in Maidenhead wasn't hugely fast-paced, Dave had music to keep him company. An accomplished pianist, "I played keyboards in various jazz-rock bands around the area, so we played at the Bracknell Jazz Festival" – an event which, for no good reason, conjures up images of hipsters smoking Woodbines by an orangey lantern light.

Dave had narrowed his direction down to two things: art or music. "So I went to art school and assumed ➤

▶ ▸ I could keep on playing in clubs until the early hours and still get into college by 9am with my brain intact." Not surprisingly, that didn't work out: "Music took a back seat, and has become my private therapy."

Maybe it is in the 'back seat', but from its place there Dave's love of music offers a constant reprieve: "It's been great to start working with film, mostly because I've rediscovered sound and music. Some of my best recent creative experiences have been putting the soundtracks together for my short films."

LESSONS LEARNED

Dave studied at the Berkshire College of Art and Design. In his four years there, one lesson stands out as being the toughest: "The hardest lesson was just to open up. To listen. To look out into the world and try to be receptive." We're so used to building defences against the world, it can be hard to take an honest look. But the rewards are plentiful: "As soon as I lowered my guard, a whole world of extraordinary work flooded in."

For this Dave has his teachers to thank: "Malcolm Hatton, who taught design, but also ran a company and gave me real work, with real briefs and deadlines; Jim Kane, who brought a hard professionalism to the course; George Glenny, who was my chaotic, inspiring drawing and semiotics teacher." The best lessons were, Dave confesses, conducted over a pint.

The biggest advance during those college days, though, was one of paradigm: "From the world of the literal to that of the abstract." Ralph Steadman opened the door a chink and after him came the likes of Jim Dine, Egon Schiele, Edgar Degas. And then came a realisation: "that this was the unique element in drawing. Paint as a painter, not trying to be photographic or realistic, but just beautifully painterly."

WORTH EXPLORING

Having come to know these great artists and illustrators, it was time to

THE TEN OF CUPS
This is another image taken from Dave's Particle Tarot series, from the Minor Arcana. A fascinating interpretation of an ancient tradition.

part company again: "Matt Mahurin, Marshall Arisman, Bill Sienkiewicz, Russell Mills – all had to go if I was ever to find my own voice.

"I've always been interested in ideas more than technique." This, says Dave, goes back to George Glenny: "Before drawing anything we had to have a clear idea of what we were trying to achieve." This involved writing a personal brief, "so, to this day I still write personal briefs for myself. I still need to be clear in my own mind what I'm doing."

This may explain some of the depth which characterises Dave's work. "Techniques may change and go in and out of fashion, but ideas are always worth exploring and re-interpreting," he adds. If your gaze is rewarded with more than reflected light, if that reflected light is carrying
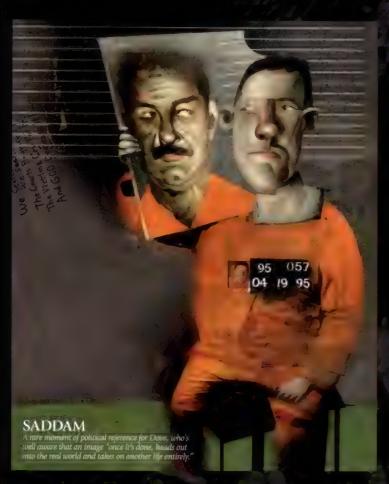
ideas with it, you have something special going on.

BORDERLINE

Some of Dave's best-known work has been created in tandem with long-time collaborator Neil Gaiman. The two first met in London in the mid 1980s, while working on a magazine called Borderline. "Neil was writing two stories, I was writing and drawing two, a period detective story called The Fox and a thriller road movie story called Going to California."

Borderline turned out to be a time-waster, but "Neil had written a story called Violent Cases, and we'd become friends." So the two booked up, and while Borderline crashed and burned, Violent Cases was already in production for Escape, and was later published by Titan Books. ▸ ▸

SADDAM
A rare moment of political reference for Dave, who's well aware that an image 'once it's done, heads out into the real world and takes on another life entirely.'

66 I've always been interested in ideas more than technique. So to this day I still write personal briefs for myself. I still need to be clear in my mind what I'm doing 99

QUEEN FROM MIRRORMASK
Mirrormask was Dave's first film with Neil Gaiman, a vision of a dark fairytale, brought to life with the help of the Jim Henson Company.

MIRRORMASK
Moving from page to screen is not without its difficulties...

Directed by Dave McKean, co-written with Neil Gaiman and produced in tandem with the Jim Henson Company, Mirrormask brings the strange alternative universe of Dave's graphic work to the silver screen.

A through-the-looking-glass journey for both characters and their creators, the project wasn't without its trials, says Dave: "Certainly there were many enjoyable bits, some great people to work with, I learned a lot, and a lot of great things have come out of it." That said, "it was slog to make."

That the project actually got off the ground was a surprise, "We were constantly fighting technical problems, drives failing, render software not working, electricity supply melting, lots of boring, painful technical [...] and I [...] eyes with [...] problems [...] the money [...] tight, "so we couldn't buy our way out of the problems."

"Like a true artist (note the small 'a') Dave is far from satisfied with the final thing: "I like bits of it, but generally I think its weaknesses are obvious." [...] on a new screenplay: "Signal To Noise will hopefully be the next film."

SCENES FROM MIRRORMASK
More of the strange characters and environments of Mirrormask. "I like bits of it," says Dave of the film.

DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY

"I use the growing family of computers in my studio for everything"

Dave McKean's work always has depth and texture to it, the kind of feel that suggests a traditional background, yet he's a dedicated Mac user.

The raw materials are usually analog, however. "I still make physical things, drawings, paintings, objects, photographs, but then scan everything and create the final images in the machine." It's a process that is gradually gaining acceptance and may one day stand alongside paint brushes and canvas as an accepted medium.

It has creative advantages too. "I keep finding things in the process that surprise me." Dave gives an example: "If you overlay an image with a copy of itself that has been compressed, then really force the levels, you start to see the differences – the JPEG compression artefacts."

The fun doesn't stop there: "If you start to play with these, all sorts of amazing patterns and colours appear." The possibilities are truly endless, but what always keeps them coming back is the flexibility: "Mostly, I'm still using the Mac for its ability to control the final image and design."

QUEEN PENTS

Dave's work frequently makes use of a collage technique. "These days everything gets scanned in and combines into the final image."

SURGEONS
This painting shows Dave's ability to shine a light in the darker corners of everyday life.

FLY
Proving that we should all be wary of anyone with one of those hats.

Dave McKean's
VITAL STATISTICS
Dreaming of flying – and relaxing

Date of birth
29 December 1963

Current location
South Kent, England

Favourite music
Almost anything. I'm not too big on mainstream poppy rocky stuff, but almost anything from modern orchestral music to electronica, jazz, tango, Balkan, African, ambient, Eastern, you name it. At the moment I really love Anouar Brahem.

Favourite traditional artist
I guess Francis Bacon for painting, Egon Schiele for drawing, Pablo Picasso for restless nature.

Favourite digital artist
That's a tricky one. I think I would say Chris Landreth for his film Ryan: one of the most beautiful uses of digital tools I've ever seen, and simply a lovely film.

First memory
Standing in a large square in Vienna, looking up and seeing an eagle. It was probably really a pigeon, but I remember it as an eagle.

Does anything keep you awake?
Time passing too damn quickly.

Average time spent on an image?
A day.

Super power you'd most like to have?
The ability to relax and enjoy life in the present moment. And flying, but I'd settle for the first one, and I'm working on it. It's harder than it sounds.

Is the truth out there?
No, it's in here.

The single most important piece of professional advice
Don't buy frozen, just make your own pizza base.

Left or right-handed
Right, but left if the drawing needs to look rubbish.

If you were an animal, what would you be?
Our cat.

Neil wasn't one for letting the grass grow under his feet. He landed the two of them an interview with Dick Giordano and Karen Berger at DC Comics. "To this day," Dave admits, "I don't know whether we had a proper appointment to see them or whether it was just a Neil blag." Either way, the result was Black Orchid. "They were wonderfully full-on days in 1986-1989, and we never questioned it all too much. We both just worked flat out."

OUTSIDE LOOKING IN
By 1990, Dave had begun to realise he wasn't a perfect fit at DC: "I felt that I needed to create my own projects as well." It had been fun for a while, but now was the time to make a move. "So long as we lunatics were in charge of the asylum I was happy to be an inmate; as soon as the guards regained control, I had to escape." In the end, Dave confesses, "I'm much happier on the outside looking in."

Following this theme, Dave proceeded with a number of influential projects through the 90s, notably Cages, a 10-issue graphic novel on the subject of creativity. There were also CD covers, books of photography and animation. They always had that outside-looking-in feel to them: "I'm not interested in stories about fairies and goblins because I'm just not a believer."

What strikes Dave as important is how we read the world. "I'm fascinated by the way the brain works, and the way we construct versions of the world for ourselves – belief systems, memories, interpretations." This goes on all the time, in our own heads, and we're very often unaware of it: "There is so much weirdness about the world, and our place in it, already, I don't see the need to create all the supernatural stuff."

MODUS OPERANDI
Since the McKean approach is cerebral, "each job or personal project is different and needs its own solution." But he's a great believer in method: "I always sketch ideas in notebooks. I need to draw things on paper first. I always try and be clear about what I'm trying to say, and make sure the image at least opens a door to possible interpretations."

This isn't deliberate David Lynch style obscurantism on Dave's part: "I don't want to make images that need an accompanying book of solutions to the puzzle. I prefer images that are, to a large degree, self-explanatory." It's important for the opening statement to be clear: "After that, the image dictates what medium I use." And the meaning of the piece becomes a dialogue.

"Obviously, once it's done, it heads out into the real world and takes on another life entirely, but I need to make sure that foundations are strong and clearly thought-through." On that basis, alternative solutions will be all the more profound. "I'm happy if there are elements that linger and don't reveal themselves completely," concludes Dave. "I'm happy for there to be plenty of room for people to draw their own conclusions." **❚**

🏴󠁧󠁢󠁥󠁮󠁧󠁿 Patrick Jones

LOCATION: England
WEB: www.hungrysparrow.
deviantart.com
EMAIL: patrick@hungrysparrow.
fsnet.co.uk
SOFTWARE: Photoshop 7, Painter IX

From playing Steve Jackson and Ian Livingstone's Fighting Fantasy game to devouring Terry Pratchett books and 2000 AD comics, Patrick says that fantasy has always fuelled his imagination.

Although his freelance work tends to be of the humorous, editorial type, Patrick's personal work has always been fantasy-oriented. "My biggest influences are Simon Bisley, Greg Staples and Josh Kirby – who first inspired me to become an illustrator."

Patrick took on a digital workflow about five years ago, when he got his iMac, Wacom tablet and Photoshop Elements. "I was initially reluctant to fully embrace the medium. I believed I couldn't achieve the same quality that I could with traditional paint. However, through much exploration, I've realised the enormous potential and freedom offered by programs such as Photoshop and Painter. I now work almost exclusively digitally."

1 ONE HELLUVA FIGHT "The guy on the left is fighting for his mortal soul... or something." And, damn, it looks hot down there.

2 PIRATE "Gaargh, shipmates! Avast, ye scurvy lubbers... and all that good stuff." Patrick's piratical penchant gets the better of him sometimes.

1 🏴 **David Cousens**
LOCATION: England
WEB: www.coolsurface.com
EMAIL: david@coolsurface.com
SOFTWARE: Photoshop

Freelance illustrator David Cousens discovered digital art only a few years ago, but now he's a real convert. "Since I found it, I've never looked back!" he says.

As well as the benefit of not losing another good shirt to some misplaced paint, what swung it for David was the freedom that the medium delivers. "Before Photoshop," he says, "I'd never really used colour in my work, I was always too afraid of my lines disappearing under paint."

David's influences come from all over the world. "My style is very 'East meets West'. I've got manga influences in there, and Marvel Comics played a big part in my artistic growth." Like so many artists these days, David is active among the online community. "I also owe a lot to some of the artists on ConceptArt.org as well."

1 STAR WARS MONTAGE Inspired by the legendary Drew Struzan. "I produced this pastiche trying to incorporate my own style into his. With the exception of drawing C3PO, it was good fun to work on. I never want to draw C3PO again!"

2 BLUES Commissioned by a client with a love of blues music and Transformers. "These images really show how colour can affect the mood of a piece, with blue representing a more morose side and red showing excitement and action."

Peter James Anckorn
LOCATION: England
WEB: www.peteanckorndesigns.co.uk
EMAIL: peteranckorn@gmail.com
SOFTWARE: Photoshop

"I've always drawn as a way of expressing my love of the fantasy genre," says Peter. Although he has a degree in Illustration, Peter considers himself largely self-taught. Since graduation, Peter has completed a number of jobs, most notably for a series of online role-playing games, including Roswell BC, and for the popular fanzine Future Quake. "I hope to find a career in the games industry or in film as a conceptual designer, while still freelancing as an illustrator and comic artist," he reveals.

1 WARRIORS A group of Stone Age warriors created for the online resource management game Roswell BC. "I used a looser style with these images, as they were drawn to be used low-res on the internet."

2 LAST STAND "In the past I'd always used the program to create cell-shaded images. Now I hope to produce more painterly art like this."

① David 'Stirzy'
Stirzaker
LOCATION: England
WEB: www.stirzy.com
EMAIL: contact@stirzy.com
SOFTWARE: Photoshop, Maya

David got into fantasy art at a young age. "Watching movies such as Star Wars and The Dark Crystal, I realised that, even though those worlds weren't real, it was someone's job to make them look real."

David became fascinated by the whole process, from concept art to finished shot. "Many hours of drawing were inspired by the Art of Star Wars books and I decided fairly early on that when I grew up I wanted to work in Special Effects."

That early decision led to David becoming the 3D artist that he is today. Ironically, learning post-production and 3D skills resulted in him having less time for drawing, which fell by the wayside. Until three or four years ago, that is, when he started to discover art forums such as ConceptArt.org and SWAG (Star Wars Artists' Guild).

Inspired by the online community, he picked up the pen again and started drawing. "Now I'm starting to think maybe my heart doesn't belong to the 3D world but to that of the character design/concept art world that inspired me when I was a kid!" David says.

① **MINOS** "This guy is supposed to be Minos, Tyrant of Karossea, the big villain from the old Fighting Fantasy book No 22 Robot Commando," explains David. "His description sounded so cool, yet they hadn't illustrated him, so I had a go!"

② **QUADRUPED GUY** "Every space opera needs a whimsical-looking, friendly alien and this chap is mine."

IFX INSIGHT
"I can't help but wonder what Quadruped Guy looks like without the suit! The rubber shoes must give him a wonderful grip running over alien landscapes."
Tom Rudderham
DVD Editor

Karl Lines, aka Angel

LOCATION: Wales
WEB: http://angelillustrations.co.nr
EMAIL: arkangel@outgun.com
SOFTWARE: Photoshop, DAZ|Studio 1.0

"I never really intended to go down the art path," says Angel. "It was always my intention to be a computer guy." So much so that he was within a hair's breadth of following a computer programming course. "Someone told me I could draw, and so the great adventure began."

Angel quit computers for pencils and paint. He followed this path through college and to a degree in illustration.

For Angel, it's about finding a balance. "Some of my pictures go for the jugular, so to speak, to make you feel the image in its basest sense, to pull an emotion out of you with a pair of red hot tweezers. Others are there just to look at and go Oooooh!"

1 CHAOS "I wanted to combine clean, solid lines with the non-stop motion that nature provides us with – a kind of amalgam of Bob Ross and Linda Bergkvist," says Angel.

2 ON WHISPERED WINGS "I wanted to do something incredible, something to capture an emotion," says Angel. He chose to use expressionistic movements in this piece, painting in gesture rather than accuracy.

3 EMBRACE THE SUN Angel wanted this image to feel more organic, so he used simulated-ink effects in the hair and thick, acrylic effects on the actual skin tones. The result is a contrast between styles and effects.

Daz Watford
LOCATION: England
WEB: www.geocities.com/dazartwork
EMAIL: darrenwatford@hotmail.com
SOFTWARE: Photoshop, Painter, openCanvas

"I have a background in traditional art," says Daz. "I bring these principles and techniques to work with digital media." That means, after scanning a pencil drawing, "I usually build up transparent layers in a similar way to watercolour techniques, then overpaint as if I were using acrylics." This has a painterly effect and gives Daz the chance to deploy his traditional techniques.

When it comes to injecting an image with feeling, there's no substitute, though: "I imagine a story behind each of my paintings," says Daz. "Then I try to capture a moment from it."

1 STEAM POWERED This is a pre-production painting for a computer game concept. "We wanted to do a Mech Warrior game that didn't look like any others. I tried to give the robots and environment a Victorian, Steampunk feel."

2 THE EGYPTIAN LICH Created in response to a ConceptArt.org brief: "I tried to suggest a lot of 'life' in a character that has essentially cheated death through sorcery," says Darren.

IFX INSIGHT
"The detail on the face in The Egyptian Lich is very impressive. It depicts the anger this character is feeling. I wouldn't want to face this character in a dark alley any time!"
Tom Rudderham, DVD Editor

🏴󠁧󠁢󠁥󠁮󠁧󠁿 Dean Oyebo
LOCATION: England
IFX PORTFOLIO: http://community.
imaginefx.com/fxpose/echos_
portfolio
EMAIL: echodragon@hotmail.co.uk
SOFTWARE: Photoshop

Dean's artistic journey began late: "I only really started taking my drawing seriously a few years after finishing school. I went on to study art and graphics at college with the intention to go to university, but that didn't go to plan." He explains further: "When my two years in A-levels were up I couldn't stomach any more education. I'm now 19 and since then I've been really focusing on my art and trying to build up some kind of portfolio that could lead to a job or even freelance work." This exposure in IFX could just be the start of a new journey...
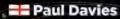
① CALLING HOME THE DRAGONS
"This really just grew out of my love of dragons," Dean explains. "I had the idea of Dragon Herders that would use their magic every year to guide the dragons home after their long trip away. I didn't think I could pull it off but then I spotted an art challenge that it could fit into, so I plucked up the courage and gave it a go."

② MONSTER IN THE CLOSET Dean has got some interesting reactions from this image: "After seeing the wet footprints most people questioned whether the person had gone into the cupboard and became the monster, or the monster had eaten them. They were convinced it was a clever twist but in all honesty it wasn't intentional."

③ THE ASSASSIN "I'm actually really overwhelmed at how much attention this has got," reveals Dean. "It was only a last-ditch attempt to throw something together for an art challenge on the ImagineFX forums. I didn't even really put that much effort into it. Other pictures that I've put a huge amount of effort into have got far less attention, so it was really unexpected."

Paul Davies

LOCATION: England
IFX PORTFOLIO: http://community.
imaginefx.com/fxpose/synesthesias_
portfolio/default.aspx
EMAIL: synesthesia3000 @ hotmail.com
SOFTWARE: Photoshop

"Sometimes the tiniest thing will trigger an image in my mind, so I always like to have my sketchbook close by," explains Paul, revealing a trait that most artists will probably recognise in themselves. "I try to draw inspiration from everything around me, from blockbuster films to the way sunlight plays off a reflective surface."

Paul's foray into digital art started at university in 2004, "after a friend showed me some concept artworks by Ryan Church and Craig Mullins. These days I work almost exclusively in Photoshop, with a library of over 500 custom brushes. I've had commissions from a variety of UK clients, and I'm now looking to move into computer games as a concept artist."

1 EAT THIS! "This was a fun image where I tried to capture the moment just before the good guys win," Paul muses. "I enjoy playing with scale in my work and I wanted to show that size doesn't matter when you have firepower! I sketched and painted it entirely in Photoshop, taking about a week in total."

2 A.I. GIRL One of Paul's personal favourites: "I like the fact that it's not clear whether she's human or machine, it's up to the viewer to decide. It was during this piece that I first started experimenting with custom brushes, a feature I'd overlooked until then!"

3 THE KOORIN These creatures were created while Paul was at university. "At the time I was working traditionally and so with this piece I wanted to create something digitally. I sketched it out in Photoshop first where I was able to make instant compositional adjustments before taking the plunge and working everything up. It took me about two weeks to complete."

✚ Christian Bravery

LOCATION: England
WEB: www.leadinglightdesign.com
EMAIL: christian@leadinglight
design.com
SOFTWARE: Photoshop CS2
JOB: Concept artist and owner of
Leading Light Conceptual Design

After the strip he was illustrating for the 2000 AD Megazine got canned in favour of reprints of Preacher, Christian came to a logical but painful conclusion: "Drawing comics was no way to make a living."
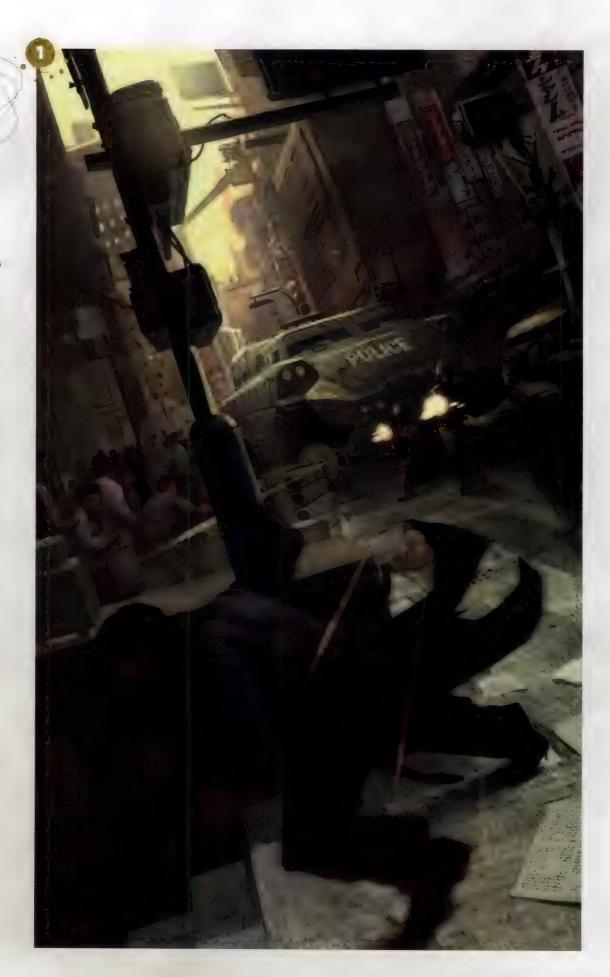
He decided to try his hand at video games. "I applied to various companies and last on the list was a new start-up called Lionhead Studios." Lionhead was looking for 'the best 3D artist in the world.' Undaunted by never having used a 3D package, Christian applied. "I spent 48 hours solid learning 3ds max 1.2 on a friend's machine and somehow got the job," he says.

For the next nine years at Lionhead, Christian worked on a number of titles and was art director on Black & White 2. Since leaving Lionhead and setting up Leading Light Conceptual Design he's stayed busy. "I've created concept art and design solutions with EA Criterion, Sony and Stormfront, and am currently working with EA Canada on the next iteration of a best-selling, triple-A franchise."

1 ESCAPE A production Illustration designed to "show off the dark and oppressive mood, near-future setting and action-based gameplay elements of the title."
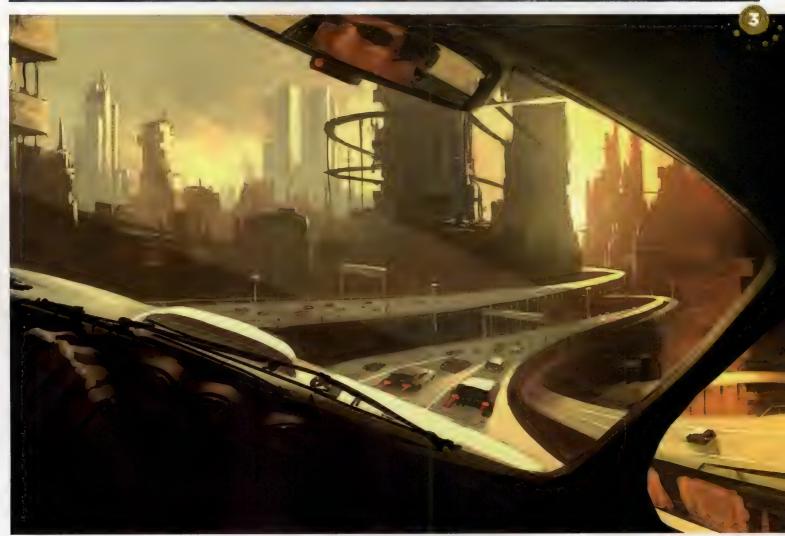
2 LOUSE "The brief here was to communicate the speed and action elements of this combat/racing title while displaying the eclectic, 'jerry-rigged' nature of the vehicles themselves," says Christian.

3 CITY "This is a key-moment illustration for a game," Christian explains. "The player enters this near-future city at dawn."

✚ Alan Lathwell
LOCATION: England
IFX USERNAME: alanlathwell
IFX PORTFOLIO: http://community.
imaginefx.com/fxpose/alanlathwells_
portfolio/default.aspx
EMAIL: alanlathwell@hotmail.co.uk
SOFTWARE: Photoshop, ArtRage

Alan is currently working as a freelance illustrator creating images in various fields ranging from children's books to greetings cards. The lure of fantasy art is never far away, though. "I just keep coming back to fantasy art, and making the jump from oils to digital has completely changed my approach to creating art," he reveals.

Inspiration comes from many artists, but Alan loves the Pre-Raphaelites and the Victorian painters JW Waterhouse and Frederic Leighton, whose use of colour Alan thinks is outstanding.

"I've drawn for as long as I can remember," says Alan. "And I've always been interested in fantasy, particularly the dark and ancient myths of Celtic and Norse mythology."

1 DEMON COMMANDER
This striking image started out as a character study that Alan just kept adding to. "I wanted the figure to look like it came from an ancient dark age so there's plenty of torn cloth and long dirty hair," he says. "I like to get a lot of dirt and grit into my pictures, and to achieve this I usually overlay my work with roughly painted surfaces – I just can't let go of that painted look!"

2 ORC AMBUSH
"With Orc Ambush I wanted to create an image full of action and energy," says Alan. "I scanned in a loose sketch painted in gouache and used ArtRage to add some brushwork, then tightened it up and finished it off in Photoshop."

3 THE WARRIOR
Here's an insight into how Alan gets to work on his amazing paintings. "When starting a painting I tend to think in terms of silhouettes and graphic shapes – the warrior is a prime example of this. From a rough pencil drawing it was completed very rapidly within a few hours in Photoshop."

✛ Tariq Raheem

LOCATION: England
IFX USERNAME: tariqart
IFX PORTFOLIO: http://community.imaginefx.com/fxpose/tariqarts_portfolio/default.aspx
EMAIL: tariq12.raheem@gmail.com
SOFTWARE: Photoshop, Painter

Tariq's work has garnered many accolades, from being in Spectrum 12 and Heavy Metal magazine to getting a CG Choice Award on CGTalk. "I love working with Painter and Photoshop as they give me the freedom to transpose my formal training with traditional media into a digital environment," he muses. "I have over 10 years of freelance and production house experience, ranging from computer game development and film and TV production to music video and TV commercial production." He recently worked on Heavenly Sword for the PS 3.

1 INA'S ANGEL
Some of the most successful works of art are ones that come from the heart. "Ina's Angel was a commission for a special person in my life, Ewelina. All the detail in it has special meaning and reference." Tariq explains how he worked on it: "For the initial paint work I used Painter, and all detail was done in Photoshop. The hardest elements to do on this were the fabric and the wings."

2 LEECH
Demonstrating his professionalism, Tariq completed this piece to put in his folio to show clients. "I wanted to create a creature concept that I could submit to Wizards of the Coast. I'm really happy with how this turned out. I used Painter for the underpainting, and all the detail was completed in Photoshop."

3 ETERNAL SERVITUDE
This was a CG challenge for CGTalk's 'master and servant' challenge," Tariq explains. "I was inspired by the Orientalists, who painted beautiful marketplace scenes, and I wanted to create something similar with a sci-fi feel. This was done in Photoshop."

FXPosé Pro
SHOWCASING PROFESSIONAL FANTASY ARTISTS

Abrar Ajmal

LOCATION: Wales
WEB: www.aaillustrations.com
EMAIL: abrar.ajmal@ntlworld.com
SOFTWARE: Photoshop, Painter 8
JOB: Concept artist

"I feel very fortunate to have had the opportunity to work as a professional artist," says Abrar. "I truly enjoy every second I spend in front of my monitor, painting dark and moody illustrations for the inspiring concepts that clients share with me.

"Fantasy and science fiction have always been the genre of choice for me as an artist." For Abrar, like many others, these themes promise endless variation: "There just don't seem to be any limits to the possibilities for directing, writing or painting exiting new projects."

Abrar began work in the gaming industry in 1999 as a full-time staff artist for a miniatures-based company, focusing on concepts and illustrations for their products. "A few years later I decided to broaden my horizons a little and move into freelancing, concentrating almost exclusively on the science fiction and fantasy genres."

The list of luminaries Abrar has so far worked with is impressive to say the least, including White Wolf Games, Sabertooth Games and Steve Jackson Games. As for the future, Abrar is looking forward to pursuing his ambitions in film and television.

1 ANGEL OF DEATH This imposing figure was completed using Photoshop from start to finish. "This piece was an idea I had while working on some concepts for a game about angels," says Abrar.

2 THE PURE Abrar's second cover for White Wolf Games was created using Photoshop.

Fred Gambino

From paint to pixels, from books to film, Fred Gambino has led a legendary career in sci-fi illustration and concept art

B ack in the mid-70s, a young Fred Gambino left the Kedleston Road School of Art and Technology in Derby with a graphic design course under his belt, but a very different course of action in mind. Though he had no formal training in illustration, he decided to give creating sci-fi imagery a shot. He took a morning job delivering groceries and devoted afternoons to painting in gouache and airbrush.

"It was actually easier for a while than I thought it was going to be," says Fred. "At that time there was a huge amount of work. The publishing industry was going really crazy; it was at the height of Chris Foss and all those science fiction covers, and they were just [being] churned out in enormous amounts."

Following advice from one of his lecturers, he showed some work to Pan Books and ended up with his first commission: cover art for Michael Bishop's Beneath the Shattered Moons. More followed, but if you're expecting us to say "and the rest was history", the decade culminated in recession. "During those winter years I shared a studio with a landscape painter and so, for a while, I did a lot of landscape painting, using oils," Fred explains.

REINVENTED ONCE

The 80s arrived and his lean years came to an end with a commission to paint covers for a series of Frank Herbert titles including The Dosardi Experiment and The Jesus Incident. Around the same time, he moved to acrylic and airbrush. "I kind of reinvented myself in a way," he says.

For the next 10 years, he worked 10-11 hour days, seven days a week, and built up a fantastic gallery of work, not to mention a fan following. Countless sci-fi authors had Gambino art gracing their covers. To rejuvenate sales, he was called in to re-cover Isaac Asimov's Foundation series and created a painting that spread across the six covers. Buy the set and you can assemble the full picture – they're still on sale today.

The 80s drew to a close, and the airbrush spluttered out of paint. "Work started to die down a bit. I actually didn't notice until I got to the end of some jobs I was working on that nothing was coming in," he says.

REINVENTED TWICE

Less work meant Fred had time on his hands. Impressed with the program Bryce, he decided it was time for a change, cashed in an endowment policy, and bought a PowerMac 6300, Bryce, Photoshop, a scanner and printer, plus Alias Sketch.

Far from being daunted, "I found the experience invigorating. Having worked in the same way for about 20 years I felt I was getting a little stale," he says. "The tools you use will have some effect on what you produce. I found the computer freed me up and enabled more experimentation. Dramatic perspectives that had been difficult or time-consuming in the past were much easier to achieve."

Work flowed again and Gambino's star continued to rise. His images made it into Fantasy Art Masters in 1999, leading to another big break. Another artist featured in the book showed it to John Davis, a movie director, who invited Fred to do concept work on the 2001 film Jimmy Neutron: Boy Genius. This in turn led to a one-year stint doing concept art, matte painting and prop design on the film The Ant Bully, which premiered last summer.

Fred continues to do sci-fi covers. He's done over 30 for the BattleTech series and has recently worked on Anne McCaffrey and Elizabeth Moon titles. But with many publishers now looking to image libraries rather than illustrators, film is the way forward. Accepting an invitation from the production designer on The Ant Bully to head out to Portland, Oregon, to start a new project with a studio called Laika, it looks like Fred has reinvented himself a third time.

Artist PROFILE

Fred Gambino

Born in 1956, Fred Gambino has been using traditional and digital techniques to illustrate book covers for 30 years. He's illustrated books for Asimov, Frank Herbert, Ray Bradbury and Anne McCaffrey. Now, he's taking his talents to Hollywood.

WEB: www.fredgambino.co.uk

DRAGONS
Teaming up with writer John Grant, Fred illustrated the book Life-Size Dragons, a 'scientific' look at the dramatic life of these mythical reptiles.

> 66 I found the computer freed me up. Dramatic perspectives that had been difficult or time-consuming in the past were much easier to achieve 99

FOUNDATION

The cover illustration panels for the Foundation series capture both the scale of the over-civilised planet Isaac Asimov imagined, and the ambition of the writer's great opus.

THE ANT BULLY

Lately, Fred has turned his talents to Hollywood prop design, concept art and matte painting.

MECHWARRIOR

For nearly six years Fred has contributed paperback covers for the BattleTech series.

Reader EXPosé

MEET SOME SUPERB ARTISTS AROUND EUROPE

Blaz Porenta
LOCATION: Slovenia
WEB: www.ninjaassn.com
EMAIL: blaz.porenta@akademija01.com
SOFTWARE: Photoshop

Blaz started drawing and painting in his early childhood, and has never stopped. At first it was just a hobby, something to fill the day, "but after I finished high school it became a true passion that forced me into taking it up as a profession," he reveals.

Five years ago, Blaz discovered digital illustration. He started submitting his work to different websites and was spotted by the right people. Next thing he knew, "I got my first job in the gaming industry, working as a concept artist." And that's where you'll find Blaz today, art-directing at Zootfly.

Besides his day job, Blaz is busy polishing his skills at the Academy of Fine Arts, and when he has the time, he also does the odd freelance project for advertising companies and even casinos. He's busy but can't complain: "I love what I'm doing so much that it still seems like a hobby," he says.

1 ENTERING BERMUDA TRIANGLE
Blaz created this piece for a CG Challenge entitled 'Spectacular'. "It's one of the most enjoyable images I've done," he says.

2 SEA RISING "Suddenly I got this idea of a massive creature coming out of an even bigger mass of clouds, destroying all in its way, not even noticing it."

②

Artist crit

Concept artist Benita Winckler gives her view

"Art is a form of dialogue. From the colour choices to the choices of composition and final form of presentation, I love images that speak to me. And this image does. It's technically excellent, it's an original idea and it invites me to think about its message. That last frozen moment before a wave starts to break – will the signs be heard?"

Dmitry Fedotoff
LOCATION: Russia
EMAIL: _absent_@bk.ru
SOFTWARE: Photoshop, Painter

Dmitry lives in the cold but very beautiful city of St Petersburg, which, he says reminds him of a dark cathedral, "especially on winter nights, which last more than 19 hours, when everything around is sparkling with rime."

Incredibly, Dmitry began to paint only a month ago, when he bought his Wacom tablet. "Until then I was visiting museums and looking at the masterpieces of great artists. I was an ordinary guy – now my day has come!"

Since the arrival of his Wacom, Dmitry has painted seven images. "The first was not so bad. I painted it at work, behind my boss's back." The second was done when Dmitry caught a cold: "It was a wonderful time. A whole week of free time! What a pity that I recovered so soon!"

Trying to find his own style, Dmitry wants to cross different pictorial styles. "My latest work is an attempt to cross old American illustrations and Russian impressionism. I don't know if I will succeed," he laughs, "but the idea is good, isn't it?"

1 SELENA This is the falling orbital craft Selena. "The greatest orbital craft which was created by men in the fantastic world of Selena."

2 TWO MONSTERS This was inspired by Stanislav Lem's Two Monsters. "I wanted to bring some madness and chaos into this picture," explains Dmitry. "To show the strange and insane world designed by the author."

Miguel Coimbra

LOCATION: France
WEB: www.miguel-coimbra.com
EMAIL: contact@grillepain.com
SOFTWARE: Painter and Photoshop

Born in December 1977, Miguel holds Portuguese and French nationality, and is currently living in Lyon. He was initially working in the IT field, "but I got bored pretty fast, so that in time I taught myself illustration and CG stuff."

This was a logical development for Miguel, who has always been passionate about games, fantasy and sci-fi: "I always dreamt of working in that industry and becoming one of the illustrators I admired so much."

Eventually, that's exactly what happened. "I've been working now in the entertainment industry for five years, first as a graphic designer, then as a concept artist for video games at Eden Games." Now he works as a freelance illustrator for role-playing games, books and trading cards.

1 JADEWIZARD "As you can see, I almost use a different technique on each image," Miguel points out. "Experimenting is what I like the most in digital art."

2 ORCS "Finished in Painter, the initial image here was black-and-white." Then Miguel shifted to Photoshop and started messing with layers and blending modes. "I added a few painting details later, and voila!"

3 SAMURAIS "It's 100 per cent Photoshop," says Miguel. "I began with big shapes and started sculpting them by adding or removing forms; when the general form appeals to me, I add detail."

Alexander Preuss
LOCATION: Germany
WEB: www.abalakin.de
EMAIL: alexpreuss@web.de
SOFTWARE: 3ds max, Photoshop, ZBrush

Alexander grew up in the small German town of Aachen, "where I spent most of my free time painting and making cartoons until I got my first computer."

The machine in question was an Amiga 2000, "and I had a lot of trouble convincing my parents that I needed this machine for school, when in reality I used it just for playing games."

Alexander realised he wanted to pursue painting and concept design as a career, and before long he got himself a job in the CG industry, as well as doing art work in his spare time.

1 THE BROKEN ARMISTICE OVER ABALAKIN "This was my first big step into the CGI world," explains Alexander. "I entered the CGnetworks' challenge entitled The Grand Space Opera in 2004. I was shocked to find my artwork was the grand prize winner."
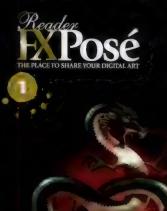
2 FINISHING LINE "I always wanted to do a great racing image," says Alexander. This took about 60 hours and featured in Exposé 4 and won the Animago Challewnge 2006 in the category Still/Professional.

3 THE DARK TOWER "This image was originally done for my wife, who owns almost every Stephen King book."

Levente Peterffy
LOCATION: Sweden
WEB: www.leventep.com
EMAIL: lp@leventep.com
SOFTWARE: Photoshop, Illustrator, Painter, Maya, 3ds max

"Levente Peterffy is the name," says Levente, "but you might also know me as Samsonsreaper from the CG forums."

Levente has a passion: "I love art and I've been doing it as long as I can remember." And he has a sincere ambition: "To hopefully keep doing it as long as I can."

1 KNIGHT5 "A self-portrait, actually," Levente explains.

2 ALEX2 Initially a pencil drawing which Levente developed further in the computer. "The character is a biomech," he reveals.

3 VALLEY_12 A speed painting. "I'm not sure if I want to call it alien or some ruins of a lost civilisation." The viewers can decide for themselves.

IFX INSIGHT

"Levente effortlessly shows how well he can light a scene. I love how cold the sea looks and the way the sun reflects off his armour in Knight5."

Claire Howlett,
Deputy Editor, IFX

①

②

🇩🇪 Christoph Jaszczuk

LOCATION: Germany
WEB: http://comicfan.cgsociety.org
EMAIL: chris.jasz@web.de
SOFTWARE: Corel Painter IX.5 and
Corel Photo-Paint 11

Christoph was born on Friday 13 July 1973 in Warsaw, Poland, but moved to Germany in 1985. Digital art can't have happened much later, because "my first encounter with it was when I got my first computer, a Commodore 64."
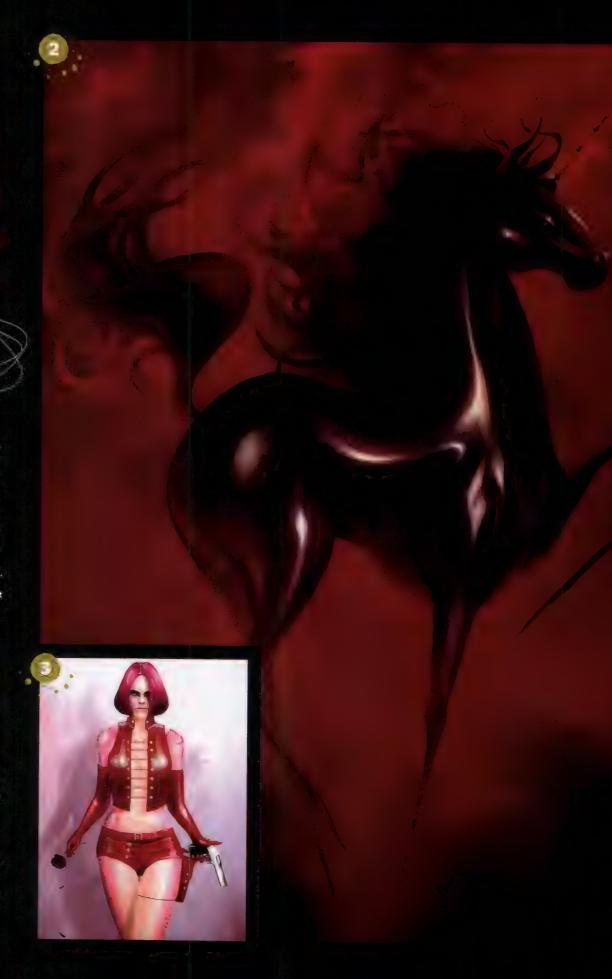
Digital painting back then wasn't really painting; "it was more like placing individual pixels in the right place. Now, with software like Painter or Photoshop, it's so much easier to create great looking art."
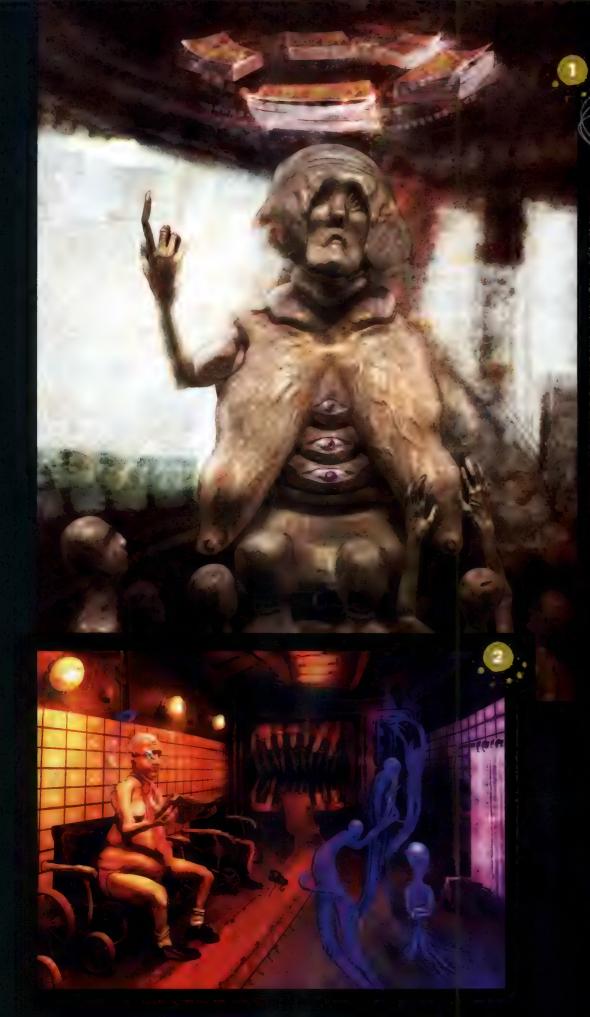
Today, Christoph's preferred tools are Corel Painter and a graphics tablet. "Most of the time I begin with a pencil sketch, but more and more I try to do it digitally from scratch. Digital painting is so great because it gives you so much freedom to make mistakes without ruining your work. It gives you Infinite possibilities that will match your infinite imagination."

① TIAMAT "In Babylonian myth, Tiamat is a huge, female dragon that personifies the saltwater ocean, the water of Chaos. She is also the primordial mother of all that exists, including the gods themselves."

② BLACK UNICORN The idea behind this piece was to create something different: "I was tired of all the unicorns looking like ordinary white horses with a horn glued on. I want my unicorns wild and black."

③ ROSE TATTOO Inspired by the comic book character Rose Tattoo from the Wildstorm universe. Christoph reveals his technique: "For the skin I used gentle strokes with Painter's charcoal brush and for the background some impasto brushes."

③

Viatcheslav Pavlenko
LOCATION: Russia
WEB: http://noisecraft.digitalart.org
EMAIL: noisecraft@yandex.ru
SOFTWARE: 3ds max, Photoshop, ZBrush, Painter

"I think it all started with photography," says Viatcheslav, "when I began shooting people, backgrounds, textures and later tried to do my first photomanipulations with them." But he craved not to be dependent on photos.

So Viatcheslav started learning 3D. "But still I thought that I needed more freedom in expressing the ideas I have, so I started taking an interest in digital painting." Without an artistic education it was hard to determine what to study at first. Viatcheslav has no shortage of goals, though: "I am at the state of improving/expanding both graphic skills and my consciousness. All that I create is personal and reflects my experience: what bothers me or what I admire, what I see looking deeper into human nature, which is my nature too."

1 BURDEN OF KNOWLEDGE It's a complicated world out there for Viatcheslav, and in this image he tries to illustrate how our perception of reality is affected by morals, rules and opinions. Having too much on our mind prevents us finding inner harmony.

2 HEAVEN FOR SLIM This piece represents two ways for life to end. "Slim in this context doesn't mean a physical quality, but rather absence of ties that bind to the material world. It's about life after death, but I wanted it to look a bit humorous."

IFX INSIGHT
"Beyond Viatcheslav's obvious command of texture and colour lies his skill in visual narrative. As an artist with something to say, he's found an engaging voice.
Paul Tysall, Art Editor, IFX

That's a good look in the
morning! One of Marko's
covers for the revitalised
Blade, for Marvel Comics!

Artist
PROFILE

Marko Djurdjevic

AGE: 27
COUNTRY: Serbia
Marko has 10 years
of experience as a
freelance illustrator and
concept designer. He's worked
in multiple fields, including
comics, video games, RPGs
and films. He loves dogs, but
is not so fond of cats.
WEB: www.sixmorevodka.com

The art of

MARKO DJURDJEVIC

"The outcome of every stroke I put down on paper will always be the same – a window into the man I am." Check out the view from Marko's window

Marko Djurdjevic runs on insight. He eschews life-models of any kind, his artistic method involving an attempt to directly express a creative vision culled from exhaustive observation. "To understand an artist," he says, "one has to see his body of work as a whole and concentrate on the most insignificant details."

Letting go is key: "I consider the process of creating art to be as complicated or as simple as finding a girlfriend: The more you try the more difficult it gets."

JUST LET GO

"When you realise that you can't force anything in this universe, when you give up and just let go, miracles happen and your future wife might just be knocking at your door," Marko adds. And it's true: he has recently returned from honeymoon.

Marko grew up in a nowhere place in the middle of Germany, "my father despotic, my mother neurotic and art a foreign language to our household." As a youngster he had no role models to follow, only instinct: "I can't say I had any influences besides the will to create from early on."

The hardest lesson to learn was the one which life most often served up: "Heroes are a myth." They only exist to keep you from becoming one yourself. "Once you realise this fundamental truth you automatically fall into the role of a hero, to make up for the lack of them." This realisation is evident in Marko's work, in the frequently pained expressions of his heroically posed characters.

Even so, a boy needs to dream, and idols form a focal point. "It took me my entire teenagerhood to discover that I don't need an idol above me to become one," says Marko. Once you've overcome this human insecurity, "you're free to be whoever you want. That's when you truly grow into the individual that you are: a man or a woman who will not be forgotten."

GROWING EXPONENTIALLY

At first sight it seems that applying these insights to art is not going to be easy, but Marko, being self-taught, disagrees. "Most of the time the approach develops as you put more time into drawing and painting. It's just a routine." It's just about following your creative nose, letting your instinct lead you. "If you're ambitious enough to put the hours into your work it really doesn't matter if you are self-taught or go to art school." The crucial thing though is to ➤➤

realise the importance of always taking one step at a time. "If you want to learn what the anatomy of a head looks like it is obsolete to draw paper cups from life."

Art is a subtle thing, and as such you can't swallow the whole thing in one go and expect to appreciate its full flavour. "You learn many mini-lessons and in the end combine them into one big lesson. If you get your basics right, your art starts growing exponentially."

BIRTH OF A LABEL

Marko met Jason Manley, Andrew Jones and Coro in early 2004. The founders of ConceptArt.org were in Amsterdam for their first workshop and invited Marko to come along and pass on some knowledge. "We instantly befriended," Marko recalls. "I drank them under the table that first night and the idea for my label SixMoreVodka was born." The lads in turn introduced Marko to the concept of their company, Massive Black.

"They asked me to join them and I agreed in a heartbeat." Initially this meant working remotely as a freelancer, but as soon as the Massive Black studio opened in San Francisco Marko was asked to go full-time

SUPER VILLAIN TEAM-UP
This impressively detailed piece is for the Super Villain Team-Up series, again for Marvel.

THUNDERBOLTS 111
The cover to Marvel's Thunderbolts issue 111 shows Marko's talent for character.

ROMAN COVER
Marko's characters often have sharp edges, making them hard to hug.

> 66 It can often be forgotten that we as artists are more than just the art we produce. The guys at Massive Black are real people with enormous life experience to back up their art 99

at HQ. This sounds like the archetypal ideal working experience, and Marko's take doesn't dispel this idea.

For openers, "Every experience we make is meaningless." It has no real value, "unless it's shared with others." If those others happen to be 10 of the most talented concept artists around, the ramifications are potentially huge: "The impact we had on each other will only be seen in the years to come but I can say that enjoyed every day of the past two years I spent with them." The 'Massive Black effect' may one day appear in textbooks.

MORE THAN JUST ART

"It can often be forgotten," Marko cautions, "that we as artists are more then just the art we produce." Artists are people, with individual stories, lives, tastes and dislikes. "Art is just a small part of us." Without this, the artist is nothing. "The guys at Massive Black were all of the above and more, real people, with an enormous amount of life experience to back up their art."

Part of that make-up is cultural, part individual, and part is random.

Marko hails from Serbia, a part of the world not unfamiliar with conflict, and he feels his roots very strongly: "I got the worst and the best out of my heritage, I guess. Serbs are a melodramatic and pathetic people who revel in their own martyrdom." At the same time, though, "they are unbelievably hospitable, loving and caring."

It's a rich heritage, one which sits on a fault line in European culture. "I think a Serbian proverb describes their mindset the best," says Marko: "Life is a pot full of shit with a glaze of honey on top. Once you lick all the honey away, you have to eat shit for the rest of your life."

TOO BIG A SACRIFICE

Distance gives perspective and from San Francisco it might be easy to diagnose the Balkan question, but Marko has left the new world and returned to the old. "I had absolutely forgotten how great Europe is in comparison to the US," he replies blithely. "Sure, career-wise America has a lot to offer for an artist that wants to have his breakthrough in the entertainment industry, but you have to make a lot of sacrifices for that."

BLADE ISSUE 6
On his ConceptArt page, Marko described this cover as "a shitload of fun to paint."

X-23 COVER
"This was the first cover I was assigned to do as a test for Marvel Comics."

THE MARVEL COVERS
The promise of professional insight

"Marvel has proven to be the most generous client I've ever worked with," says Marko. Given the sheer number of people that he has worked for over the years, this is no small compliment.

"The amount of artistic freedom they leave me in my creative approach is unlike anything I've ever seen." This is interesting because Marko isn't a natural Marvel fanboy.

"I don't have to necessarily love the subject of my work to enjoy the process of my work," he argues. "Does a car mechanic revel in motor oil spilling all over him, or the lady complaining that her SUV isn't finished yet, in order to love repairing cars?"

Marko enjoys making pictures that are challenging. "I enjoy getting my stuff printed and I feel happy if my work entertains and inspires others. The subject doesn't matter as long as there exists excitement towards the artistic process of a piece."

Something else comes from this relationship: "It gives me the opportunity to change what I dislike the most and push for my personal vision of what I'd love all comics to look like." This is all to Marvel's credit: they have realised that "one of the biggest challenges of an artist is to make something that you don't like better than it was." Marko's covers speak for themselves.

HISTORY GUY
Marko prefers the historical richness of Europe to the modernity of the United States.

Marko Djurdjevic

DRAWING ON THE IMAGINATION

"If we can have a picture in our mind of what someone is supposed to look like, why shouldn't we be able to project that image on to paper or canvas?" Marko utilises the power of the mind...

"Coming from a family that neglected art as a whole and with a lack of information in school, I thought that all art was created from imagination." Mastering this approach became Marko's goal.

Fascinated by the idea that others could create realistic representations of life relying on memory alone, "I fooled myself into believing that the way to become a great artist was to observe everything and memorise it." And with this in mind Marko began developing empathy towards the people around him, "spending countless hours on park benches watching passers-by, saving their every motion to my inner

hard drive." Such close people-watching is not a quick process: "I can't even say how many nights I spent in bars, just watching people as they moved, spoke, thought, relaxed, all the time building a database for myself to draw from." Later, when Marko found out about models and props, "I almost felt disillusioned that I'd spent my whole life trying to ape something that rarely exists."

Having come this far, "I was too proud of what I had achieved to give up on my approach." To this day Marko continues to develop his memory in hopes of finding a way to create a completely realistic representation of life direct from imagination.

SUPER VILLAIN TEAM-UP 4
Issue 4 of Super Villain Team-Up, which Marko began sketching in his favourite medium: pencils.

SPIDER-MAN
Marko's alternative take brings a new feel to Marvel characters, even Spidie.

Workshop
NO FEAR TO CREATE

Embrace the limitless possibilities that art creates by learning how to shed your inhibitions and unleash your full creative potential by saying goodbye to fear.

> ## "Art, next to meditation, hypnosis and dreams, is the only way to tap into the unconscious. What rests within us comes to us in moments of artistic expression"

➤➤ And for Marko, the sacrifices are too many. "Start with something as simple as food: it's tasteless and unhealthy. Take entertainment: it's cheap and pointless. Take education: it's medieval and uninformed – based on fear of God, pseudo-democratic diatribe and TV brainwash." Europe has its problems but these have become like the lines on a characterful face.

"If you jump on a train in Europe and ride for a thousand kilometres, you can pass dozens of different countries, cultures, languages – inhale a multicultural world," Marko enthuses. Cities like Berlin, London and Paris are cornerstones of art and culture; they cast a long shadow across history. This gives an individual his context and something to kick against.

HYPNOSIS AND DREAMS

This question of context is important to Marko. The idea of forcing your work to have meaning is crazy, he argues: "Art, next to meditation, hypnosis and dreams, is the only way to tap into the unconscious," he says. "What rests within us comes to us in moments of artistic expression, not the other way around."

The artist dreams for the rest of us. "If we search," says Marko, "we find nothing." That would be like trying to interpret a dream based on its most obvious symbols when in fact, "it's the most insignificant detail that matters in a dream."

The same is true with art: "I can try to sit down and ponder over the artistic value of my next piece and find nothing but a desert of empty platitudes, or I can just let go and have the meaningful things crawl out of me, plant them into details that on a single glance don't matter much but have the most powerful of meanings when seen as a big picture – in this case the body of work an artist leaves behind." In this way, an image is free to accept the interpretations of its viewers.

HARD TO HUG

"Most of my characters have some sort of spikes on them," Marko observes. "This makes it hard for others to hug them." Is

BLADE ISSUE 4
Blade finds himself getting into trouble with Santa in this Christmas special.

this a suggestion of some subconscious defence mechanism, to never let people get too close? "Most of my male characters are androgynous to a certain extent, and even more so, a majority wears skirts," he adds, speculating that this could be an indicator of his empathetic female side, or a rejection of men as a whole. Who knows?

What it really boils down to for Marko is this: "I'm consciously avoiding the expression of anything in my work. Instead I'm enabling my mind/soul/heart/psyche to speak as freely as it will." If you try to imbue your work with some sense of purpose you're risking the ultimate: "kitsch."
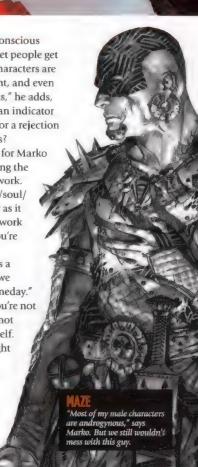
For Marko, in the end, "art is a reflection of who we are, who we were and who we might be someday." Pretending to be something you're not might convince others but it's not going to work so well on yourself. "I consider it to be our birthright to create," concludes Marko. "That's what separates us from monkeys – we leave traces. To be afraid of doing so is to me like cutting away the privilege of what defines us as a species, as mankind." ●

MAZE
"Most of my male characters are androgynous," says Marko. But we still wouldn't mess with this guy.

Photoshop

NO FEAR TO CREATE

Art means limitless possibilities, but to be able to create freely we must shed our fears. **Marko Djurdjevic** shows us how

Artist PROFILE

Marko Djurdjevic
COUNTRY: Serbia
CLIENTS: Marvel Comics, Massive Black, Wizards of the Coast, White Wolf, Dark Age Games

Marko has 10 years of experience as a freelance illustrator and concept designer. He's worked in multiple fields, including comics, video games, RPGs, and films. He loves dogs but loves his wife the most.
URL: www. sixmorevodka.com

Try it yourself
For all the files you need, visit www.imaginefx.com and click on Downloads. For a trial of Photoshop, visit www.adobe.com

C reativity is one of the things that makes us human: it's what separates us from monkeys. Too often we hinder ourselves in our creative process, because we're afraid of the outcome. But who is to judge us for what we do? The paper? The art police? Confidence in every decision is what makes art become relevant. This workshop focuses on making confidence your weapon of choice when creating art.

Rules only apply if you let them dominate your work. A free mind can achieve anything, and whatever others may think of your work, it doesn't matter as long as you enjoy what you're doing. Don't let questions hinder your process, make them become your process.

Every line you put down on a sheet of paper is a question – "Where am I going?" If you let the answer scare you, you'll never find out. But if you enable yourself to become part of the journey, art becomes easy and fear can be forgotten. There's no right or wrong in art: you either love your trade or you don't, and denial will lead you nowhere.

1 Enter
I start out with a white document. Loose lines are my first choice, since they offer me the chance to pick up any direction I want to go to. I zoom out as far as possible, because I want to keep an eye on the entire image. I really try not to think at this stage, as thinking hinders the exploration of my work. Magic always seems to happen when I'm not worried and in this case I'm completely relaxed.

2 Access granted
After my first lines start to roughly resemble a human figure in motion, I begin adding values in black and white to apply volume to my forms. I still have no idea where this is going, what it will resemble or if it's going to look good. What matters most is to keep my mind free for the possibilities of each randomly applied stroke, to see patterns in the painting that will help me figure out what I want to achieve with it. Every line means limitless possibilities, even if it's apparently a wrong line. I work with a default Charcoal brush set to a 100 per cent Opacity, with Pen Pressure applied.

Shortcuts
Fit on screen
PC: Ctrl+0
Mac: Cmnd+0
Zooms your file back to screen size for full view.

3 Fear is a lousy friend
I'm making some stronger decisions as I come along. I add a diagonal shape to the bottom of the character to complement the diagonal of the back arm. I'm also washing the white background with a mid-tone, to make the highlights on the figure stand out more. I'm not afraid of screwing up, so I paint on one layer only, throughout the entire image. I approach each digital painting as I would approach a real-life canvas. I never use undos – if something goes entirely wrong, I prefer to fix it by painting on top of it. I consider the lessons learned by doing so to be much more valuable than just going back a few steps with a shortcut. After all, real life doesn't have an undo function.

4 Multiply

I copy my layer and set it to multiply to achieve stronger darks and give the entire piece more contrast. Afterwards, I flatten the layers. But I will need a focal point to keep myself interested. I decide to flesh out the face a bit more, to add expression to this otherwise rough sketch.

5 Instinct

I'm far enough into the piece to start adding colour and spice it up a bit. I put a colour layer on top of my black-and-white image and apply a quick wash of browns, blues and reds. The palette is rather intuitive at this point: I just try to have a nice contrast between cools and warms, to make the forms read better. I flatten the layers again.

6 Are you talking to me?

I Quick Mask the figure, desaturate the background a little and use the Hue slider to push towards a deeper red. I grab a Texture brush to paint some more interesting clouds for the background. I use the Dodge tool to enhance the highlights on the character's armour.

and then go back in to his face to render the expression more. This will be the key to my image, so I want to put some extra love into it.

7 All that glitters...

I realise that the armour sucks. So what? I just paint over it. To always stick to one idea is like driving a truck against a wall. If you can make a decision during your process that makes your painting look better in your eyes, but it means destroying what you've already created, then by all means do so, no matter how attached you are to a detail in the first piece. Attaching yourself to a piece of art or a single detail breeds stagnation. A

good artist must always be able to destroy his own creation and use it as a foundation for something entirely new.

8 Consideration

Now that I have my expression for the character down and the mood captured to a certain extent, I want to flesh out some other areas. I focus on the arms, define the sword at the back a little more and keep working on the armour.

9 Characterisation

I put more definition into the armour plates and add a dash of red as a colour variation to the background. I add scratches to the armour to give the character more story. What is this guy about? Why is he so angry? A lot of questions shoot through my mind and help me define the characteristics more.

PRO SECRETS

Kick undo

Ctrl/Cmmd+Z just isn't worth your time. Learn to make a strong and confident decision and your art will improve tremendously. Don't rely on going back in time to save things. Have them right the first time, or paint right over it. You'll learn more from your mistakes by facing them instead of running from them.

10 Embrace change

The character now carries a secondary sword in his other hand and I apply another red splash with a Texture brush to the background. I use the Dodge tool to make it juicy and pop. But I'm running out of space here, so I copy my image on to a new layer, flip it around, then scale it until I have new room to enlarge the entire composition. Again, change is a constant factor in my work and I embrace that feeling.

11 Pseudo-dynamics

Looking at the piece compositionally we have multiple (almost) parallel diagonals that are intersecting each other now. This helps the picture achieve dynamism without actually being a dynamic representation. The intersecting diagonals also add depth because they show what is in front and what is at the back. These diagonals are achieved if you apply tension to your

figurative work. I enjoy having my characters suffer from gravitation, carrying heavy objects or just being bent by the burdens of life to introduce these dynamic diagonals into my art.

12 Eagle eye

I zoom out again to double-check whether everything within my painting reads from afar. This is essential to every piece and the best way to figure out if an image needs visual punch in some overlooked areas.

13 No rules

I move back into the painting again, defining the arm in the front more and putting some attention into the sword. Overall, I want to give my character a supernatural sort of feel, so I keep my skin tones pale and dominated by neutrals. The red variations towards the hands work as a temperature shift to make the arm as a whole visually more appealing. Next, I throw a light purple overlay layer on top of my painting to put more colour variation into the lit areas, then I flatten the image. This entire process continues to be intuitive. I'm following no plan or set of rules. I'm just applying what I like and taking away what I dislike, so the rendering never becomes boring. This mindset keeps me fresh throughout the entire image creation process and I don't fall prey to getting lost in my details.

14 One brush

The next thing I do is add some veins to increase the surface texture of the arm, since it's one of the more important compositional elements of the painting. I try to emulate all kinds of surfaces and textures by just using one brush (default Charcoal). I always enjoy a challenge in art and I try to avoid using shortcuts as much as possible. I firmly believe that great art doesn't depend on the medium used, or the perfect brush for every situation, but on the will to create believable images. I know people who can make great art with a pen on toilet paper – all that matters is how willing you are to make it look right.
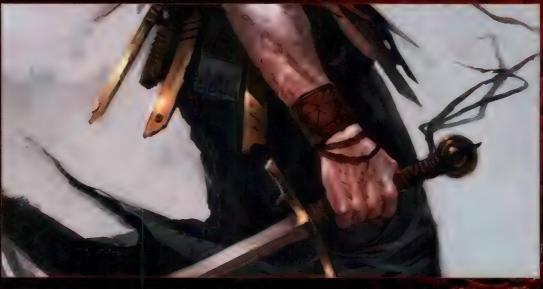
15 Abstraction

To force more drama into this piece, I add flying pieces of pattern and cloth. These random shapes generate mood and bring a new dimension to the piece. There now seems to be atmosphere and wind; the character exists within a living environment, even though we only see an empty sky in the background – the visual elements that we're being presented with make our subconscious minds fill in the blanks. These abstract shapes aren't clearly defined and so they're great for leaving room for imagination. On top of that, they're close to the borders of the image,

PRO SECRETS

Keeping a fresh eye

Always sleep one night over a finished piece and take a fresh look at it in the morning. You'll always find multiple little flaws that you can get rid of immediately by just taking the time to distance yourself from your work and see it with a fresh pair of eyes the next day.

giving us the feeling that more is happening outside of the frame. I also add a wristband to the character's forearm, a small element that will make the area differ from the rest of the arm.

16 Last minute realisations

I suddenly realise that I've made a logical mistake throughout the entire painting. The neck armour simply doesn't work, since he wouldn't be able to lift his head. I will have to correct this soon, before I forget about it. I've blocked the entire figure in and now I'm checking on areas that still need work. The left arm and sword are considerably undefined and I'm not happy with the position of the arm. The hand looks like a stump since we see it from the underside and there are no fingers to define the form; I'll change that too. I throw a colour layer on top of my

painting and make a quick red wash over the front arm to give it more life. I start pushing volume into the character's skirt – the painting is now dominated by the three primaries, red, yellow and blue.

17 Final touches

I apply final touches here and there across my image. These steps are almost invisible but require the utmost care. I zoom into a detail of choice and start pushing volumes and values around, adding areas of reflected light. I focus on making temperature relationships between cool to warm, instead of pushing too far into the contrast between dark and light areas. At this point I have the feeling that I could take this image even further by just picking detail after detail and rendering it until it reaches a more realistic state.

18 Endgame

The finished work. I change the neck armour into a more functional piece. I also flip the arm at the back so we can see the fingers grappling the sword. I pour some more love into the shadow areas, using reflecting light to flesh out volume. I try to find the right balance between finished and unfinished areas, but to know when to stop working on something is an entire workshop all by itself.

Mikael Modeen
LOCATION: Finland
WEB: http://mody.uplink.fi/
EMAIL: mody@stinc.org
SOFTWARE: Photoshop

Mikael is a 27-year-old art student from Helsinki. He's loved drawing since he was little. "My favourite subjects have always been fantasy and science fiction," he says.

Studying more traditional styles of painting at an art school didn't take away Mikael's interest in fantasy art, but it did make it harder to actually create: "The style isn't really encouraged in most art schools, so for years I didn't have a way of expressing that side of me." That is until last summer, when Mikael bought a copy of ImagineFX.

"I was amazed by the artwork in it," he beams. "And it didn't take long before I went out, bought myself a Wacom tablet and started creating." Having been painting digitally for only a short time, "it feels like I'm learning something new with every painting I make. I like the versatility of digital painting and the speed at which you can bring a painting to completion."

1 DEMON "This is the first painting I made after getting my Wacom!" says a proud Mikael. "The simple design of the demon was a good way for me to explore the new medium, and some funky lighting effects!"

2 HEAVY Based on a character concept for a game project Mikael and friends have been working on. "The project has never really got past the planning phase, but I thought the character deserved to be set in a proper background."

3 IT'S HIS TURN! "Like most fantasy and sci-fi art, most of my paintings have a pretty dark colour scheme," Mikael notes. "With this piece I wanted to try some lighter and warmer colours to support the intended easygoing and humorous mood of the concept."

Lars Rasmussen
LOCATION: Denmark
WEB: http://lars-rasmussen.
deviantart.com
EMAIL: work@lars-rasmussen.dk
SOFTWARE: Photoshop

Drawing enthusiast
Lars started out in the
advertising industry. "I
figured this to be my ticket
to do what I enjoyed most."
Of course, after ten years in the
business, "I've only done a small
handful of actual illustrations, as
the job mainly concentrates on layout
and general aesthetics. But recently I
rediscovered the insane satisfaction of
putting pen to 'paper'."

There's a lot to catch up on, but
Lars has a thirsty sponge for a mind,
"every day learning new cool things
and techniques, and always seeking
advice and criticism through the
fantastic online art communities."

1 **GO AWAY!** A ferocious prehistoric
beast versus parental courage and a
branch on fire. "For this one I had a lot
of fun making custom brushes from
mainly bark and rock surfaces."

2 **THE 2ND EXPERIMENT** The second
version of an experiment this poor
guy has to endure, and no one really
knows what kind of crazy science he
is subjected to.

3 **PARCEL CARRIERS** "This piece was
an experiment," says Lars. "The
design came by playing around with
abstract blobs of colour, then refining
what I found interesting."

Artist crit

Artist Daryl Mandryk shares his views

"What I enjoy about this image is the storytelling going on here. The huge creature creates a great sense of impending drama and there is an implied relationship between the two characters. I like the sense of mystery, and little touches, like the monster's drool, the birds, and the roots on the cliff, help to draw the viewer in."

Monica Trica
LOCATION: Romania
IFX PORTFOLIO: http://community.
imaginefx.com/fxpose/moniquettes_
portfolio/
EMAIL: monica_trica@yahoo.com
SOFTWARE: Photoshop CS2

Monica Trica, aka
Moniquette on ImagineFX.
com, only recently got into
digital art – she first picked
up a stylus in 2004. "My
sources of information were the
workshops I found browsing the internet
and various books," she tells us. "It was
then I joined several art websites where
I received feedback and advice, which
meant a lot for my development as a
digital artist. I find my inspiration mainly
in an imaginary world made of fantasy
and dark subjects.
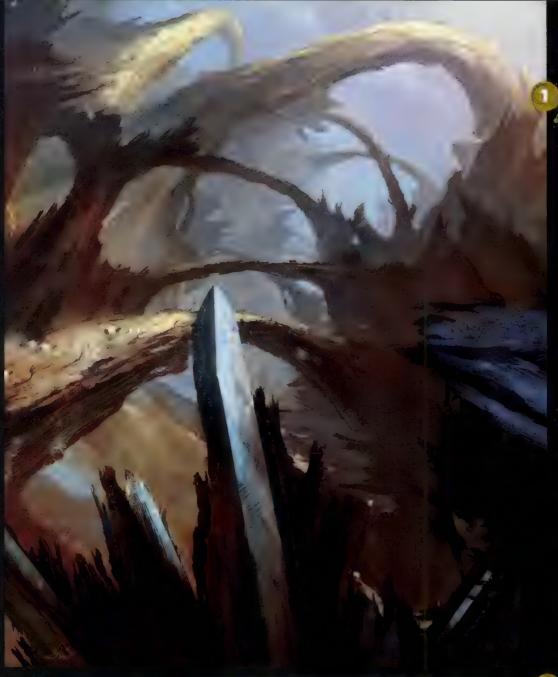
"Creating art is, for me, a privilege
and a necessity at the same time," she
adds, "and this is why I will continue to
explore new artistic paths in the future."

1 DELICATELY NOT YOURS
"Delicately not yours is an attempt
to describe the beauty of loneliness
and the sadness of accepting the
unavoidable." This is symbolised by
the ribbons that tie the character's
wrists – and is, as Monica tells us, "a
connection between the frail human
beauty and the eternity of the stone."
She continues: "I tried to get a
contrast between the simplicity of the
theme and the intricate use of details
and ornaments. The mood is mainly
given by the blue colour tones and the
dramatic pose of the central figure."

2 FREEDOM
"What's the use of
wings when you can't fly with
them? What's the use of dreams?
Or butterflies?" Monica used photo
manipulation techniques in Photoshop
CS to create this piece in June 2006.

1

Björn Wirtz
LOCATION: Germany
WEB: www.derwolpertinger.de
EMAIL: webmaster@derwolpertinger.de
SOFTWARE: Photoshop

Björn was born in the late 70s, and started drawing at the age of four. "I always created strange comic characters back then. They're pretty fun to look at now."

Thankfully, after a creative pause during adolescence, "I found the way back and decided to study visual communication at the University in Krefeld, Germany." Through the work he did there, Björn made first contact with computer programs including Photoshop. Later in his studies, Björn concentrated on digital illustration and finally graduated last year.

"When I recall the days of playing Battletech in the mid-1990s or, later on, the fun I had painting Warhammer characters, I'm convinced that the interest in fantasy and science fiction has always been there." But the real breakthrough came with the discovery of CGTalk in 2002. The online community continues to inspire: "It helps push me to become better."

When it comes down to it, Björn loves creating fictional environments and images that convey certain moods. "In the future," he says, "I would like to work as a concept artist."

1 WESTERN ENVIRONMENT This image started as a test for a newly created rock brush. "I liked the initial shapes a lot and decided to work on it further. As the painting evolved I imagined some settlers in unexplored scenery searching for resources."

2 THE BREAKUP "Despite the warm colours, I wanted this painting to convey a rather dark mood," says Björn. "Therefore I chose a pretty worn look that I've achieved through the overlaying and masking of several photographic textures."

2

Norbert Vakulya

LOCATION: Hungary
WEB: http://art.rpg.hu/categories.
php?cat_id=85
EMAIL: norbertvakulya@freemail.hu
SOFTWARE: Paint Shop Pro, Painter

Norbert was always fascinated by drawing. "At the age of 12, a Commodore Plus/4 stepped into my life and changed it completely. As the years went by, I became a computer programmer instead of an illustrator."

Norbert still works as a computer programmer, so drawing – and writing fantasy stories – is only a hobby. And although he's never had a lesson, it seems that Norbert is not without talent in these areas: "Some of my stories have been published in fantasy anthology books, and I had the chance to make the cover illustration of some books too."

As he was working with computers anyway, the use of the digital medium came naturally. "At first I painted with a mouse, but that was just a nightmare." Norbert still liked it, though. Now he works with a Wacom tablet. "I know I have a lot to learn," he says. "But hopefully I'll become better and better, and you'll hear about me in the future."

1 BALROG "This is my version of the Balrog from a couple of years ago," says Norbert. It was initially a pastel sketch, to which Paint Shop Pro provided a little bit of extra life.

2 WANT A GUIDE TO MORDOR? Norbert was so keen on our Lord of the Rings theme that he transformed an older alien painting into Gollum, one of his favourite characters.

Arnaud Caubel
LOCATION: France
WEB: http://arnocob.cgsociety.org
EMAIL: arnocob@yahoo.fr
SOFTWARE: Photoshop

Parisian Arnaud, 32, started as a freelancer for events and decoration agencies five years ago. "The concepts shown here were made for a personal project in order to research a style," he reveals.

Arnaud begins with pencil, "and generally, it's visible in the finished image," he says. This enables proximity between viewer and draughtsman.

Photoshop is Arnaud's favourite software for the colouring process but surprisingly, though he sometimes uses a tablet, a mouse is more usual. "What I like is to reinforce the functional aspect of an environment, to make it plausible, even if it contains strange elements."

1 AEROBASE This is the first piece of a 20-concept suite of flying machines that Arnaud began a year ago. "I tried to evoke the lightness of the machine. This ship is part of a dock when it's on the ground."

2 MESSAGE FROM UNDER "A kind of homage to Jules Verne – an attempt at adventure illustration," says Arnaud.

🇮🇹 Giuliano Bròcani

LOCATION: Italy
WEB: http://notpill.cgsociety.org, www.giulianobrocani.com
EMAIL: Info@giulianobrocani.com
SOFTWARE: Painter, Photoshop

Giuliano works as an art director in the advertising industry, where he does "sketches, retouching and manipulation for print ads, campaigns and stuff."

He may be new to digital painting but he's been using a Wacom tablet for years – handy because he's "a reborn painter, thanks to the latest challenge at CGTalk: The Journey Begins."

And now his journey really has begun: "All my spare time is spent on Painter and Photoshop or reading ImagineFX!"

1 THE JOURNEY BEGINS "I've learned a lot from feedback and the other entries. It was a really cool experience!"

2 CACHE OVERLOAD "The trouble with this old crappy model is that you can't completely shut it down."

IFX INSIGHT

"The look on the soldier's face and the colours used in Journey Begins really evoke the feeling of terror. Giuliano has mastered the art of storytelling in this piéce."
Claire Howlett,
Deputy Editor
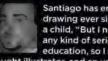
Santiago Iborra

LOCATION: Spain
WEB: www.quellion.com
EMAIL: santiago@quellion.com
SOFTWARE: Photoshop CS2

Santiago has enjoyed drawing ever since he was a child. "But I never took any kind of serious art education, so I am a self-taught illustrator, and an undisciplined student at that."

Only recently, when he decided "to jump into the abyss" and try to go pro, did Santiago start studying composition, colour theory and anatomy books in a more systematic manner. "I work with pencils and Photoshop," he adds, "using 3D sometimes as a guide when there's a heavy architectural component in the image, to get the perspective right."

Currently trying to improve his use of colour and loosen up his brushwork, Santiago first came into contact with fantasy art through the beautiful art of Elmore, Easley and Parkinson in the old D&D books, and also through Buscema and Windsor-Smith's Conan comics.

1 GREYBARK "The Santharian Dream is a world-building site, where writers and artist add descriptions and illustrations of races, people and places." This picture reminded a lot of people of the film Willow.

2 ARMEROS, GOD OF WAR This is one of Santiago's favourite contributions to The Santharian Dream.

THE ART OF
DANIEL DOCIU

"You can take a bazillion different paths to the same place." Daniel Dociu carves a cubed route into the future...

When you look at a piece of Daniel Dociu's concept work, your first thought isn't 'that's a great painting'. You're too quickly sucked past that level of experience, directly into the world he portrays. You're transported not by realism, but by the artist's ability to convey the truth of imaginary things.

Take a few examples from his latest project for ArenaNet's Guild Wars: a bird's-eye view of the Crescent Island complex, the perspectivised pyramids of mythical Egypt or the tiny details of weapons and armour. "I approach illustration from the position of an aid to communicate something," says Daniel. "That something can be more or less abstract" – an object, an idea or an emotion.

Returning to this world you begin to wonder at Daniel's style – where does he conjure those shapes from? That feeling for alternative worlds? Answering these questions takes us on a fascinating journey that starts behind the Iron Curtain.

IMAGINING THINGS

Daniel grew up in Romania when it had just been vacated by Soviet troops; it was a communist country with all the arcane and seemingly non-communist practices of a regular dictatorship. But for a youngster this was less of a concern, and Daniel was busy discovering his artistic nature.

"I was drawing a little bit of everything," he recalls. From early on he was interested in objects: "in general, structures and architecture, objects, furniture." Although his parents wanted him to become a doctor or an orchestra conductor, Daniel had other ideas. "I just was really attracted from a very early age to building, designing and imagining things."

This took Daniel to a high school that specialised in art and design, and from there to the Fine Arts Academy in his home town of Cluj, where he specialised in industrial design. "I graduated from my masters degree with the highest grade point average in the ➤➤

Artist
PROFILE

Daniel Dociu
AGE: 49

COUNTRY: US
Daniel Dociu was born in Cluj, capital of Transylvania. A gifted industrial designer, he found his way to the United States in 1991 and from there into the world of video games. He has worked for many companies, including Wizards of the Coast, EA Games, and Microsoft, and for the last four years has been art director of ArenaNet in Seattle.
WEB: www.arenanet.com

❝ I've always used illustration to get a point across, to communicate an emotion, a mood, a structure ❞

CRAB FORTRESS
"Gigantic war machines inhabited by nomadic tribes, each with its own history, mythology and social structure," says Daniel.

FISH FORTRESS
Another fortress: "Sometimes their paths cross."

DANIEL DOCIU
ARENANET – GUILD WARS

"Oh my god, I don't have normal maps or bump maps!
I look so last year!" Or, how to beat the tech crunch.

"It's an MMORPG with a competitive side to it." With a typically wry tone, Daniel Dociu describes the massively multiplayer online role-playing game he's worked on for the last four years. "It's a lot of letters, I know, but it's a deep and complex game."

Game development has more than its fair share of pitfalls, and Daniel pinpoints a major one: "I think too many developers are falling into the technology trap. Everyone is striving for realism and this is making everything look uniform and boring."

Daniel and his 50-strong team are currently polishing the fourth Guild Wars campaign, Eye of the North. For this, as with previous campaigns, their goals are complex: "We're trying to depart from established perceptions of fantasy and push the envelope, gradually."

Their aim is an experience that delivers aesthetic value alongside the gameplay, and they seem to have succeeded. "In general, we've scored high on the look of the game," says Daniel. "We've struck a kind of sweet spot on how stylised we are. It's not vanilla but it's not way out there."

Daniel is right when he bemoans the quest for realism. Even so, it takes a steady hand and a degree of confidence to buck a trend, particularly one as well established as the rush towards realism.

CRESCENT STREET
Blending Mediterranean influences, this ??? to illustrate the architecture of Guild Wars' Crescent Island.

SKY BRIDGE
A light structure spanning a deep canyon would offer refuge to a secluded tribe.

country," he says. This entitled Daniel to first pick of the available jobs. It was, he says, "A bit like the NBA draft."

But having his pick of the jobs was tarnished by the fact that even the best job was "a shitty job". Daniel spent the next five years designing products for a conglomerate of outmoded Eastern Bloc enterprises. "It was a fiasco," he says.

EASTERN BLOC ENTERPRISE

Eventually, his educational debt paid off, Daniel returned to Cluj as a teacher at the academy from which he had graduated. This gave him time to reflect on his own motivations, in particular his need to be creative in a practical sense as he enjoys "the process of inventing new structures."

Daniel's concerned that others may misunderstand what this means. "If that sounds pretentious…" he begins. But this sentence is never finished. Instead, he reiterates, "I love that part of the process." This 'part of the process' occurs largely in his head. "I've always used illustration to get a point across," he explains, "to communicate an emotion, a mood, a structure and the way it's put together."

Bringing these skills to the world of computer games involved more adventure for the Dociu family. "My wife and I left Romania in the summer of 1989… right before the shit hit the fan in Eastern Europe." Four years and several jobs later and Daniel landed a position with Seattle-based developer SquareSoft.

DIVERSITY

Daniel was a natural. His training as an industrial designer instilled an intuitive grasp of three-dimensional space, and his teaching career gave him the ability to nurture and direct talent. Within months he was promoted to art director and has since fulfilled that role for the likes of Microsoft, EA and, for the last four years, ArenaNet.

And this brings us to something that Daniel feels very strongly about: diversity. As an art director, it's crucial to see the big picture. "I strongly believe that diversity is the most important quality

UNDEAD DRAGON
There's always a dragon in fantasy games.

You should not look for a style of your own just to be different. It should evolve over time

KINGS & GODS

"The idea that power is relative opens innumerable story and gameplay possibilities."

➤➤ in a team... We are a lot more different than we are similar in our ways of thinking." And Daniel believes this should be a source of strength.

If everyone were to follow exactly the same thinking patterns they'd end up with exactly the same results. "That's not what I'm looking for as an art director," says Daniel. "I'm looking for the team to enrich and build upon a half-baked idea or a vision... Once I throw that idea out and people start approaching it from different

ngles, that's when it truly be████ ██ ██ and layered and grand."

So the eventual style of a piece is conducted like an orchestra, rather than cloned. "This is another subject I have strong feelings about," Daniel notes. In personal terms, style should come naturally. "It should not be the result of a deliberate search. You should not look for a style of your own just to be different; it should evolve over time as the result of where your true interests are."

DANIEL DOCIU
JUMPING SHIP TO DIGITAL

"I figured hey! I can't fight it, so I might as well try it."

Growing up behind the Iron Curtain may not have been fun but it gave Daniel a form of creative independence that's rare these days. Naturally, he studied art history, "but it stopped at the turn of the century." When Europe split politically, art had to follow suit if it was to serve different ideologies.

And there was no local alternative because control over printing technology in Romania was absolute – you couldn't own a typewriter unless it was registered. Daniel's dad had one but he kept it locked up. "And to this day I'm a lousy typist," says Daniel.

It's not really an understatement to say that when he

arrived in the US, aged 32, Daniel had a traditional illustration background. Oddly though, he was well equipped to work in video games. So much so that "I can see a super-complicated wire frame from across the room and absolutely read that shape."

But still, the move to digital technology wasn't without its hiccups. "I discovered the lens flare and I thought this must be the ticket," Daniel reveals. But eventually good sense reasserted itself. "Things went full circle and I realised that following my instincts and what originates directly from my sensibility led to better and more honest results." There's a moral to this story: "I gave up on gimmicks and got more satisfying results."

URBAN CANAL

This is a piece with an Eastern inspiration, as this watery urban landscape pays homage to the fascinating slums of Kowloon's Walled City in Hong Kong.

Learning to understand your particular style is a Zen-like challenge. "I was desperate to invent a style for myself," Daniel recalls. "The more I tried, the more miserable I felt. Only when I gave up the deliberate search

> ## ❦ Only when I gave up the deliberate search and did whatever came naturally did my style begin to crystallise ❦

DANIEL DOCIU
VITAL STATISTICS
Vietnamese noodle soup nourishes the body and brain...

Full name
Daniel Dociu.

Date of birth
11 July 1957.

Current location?
Seattle.

Favourite music?
Blues.

Favourite traditional artist?
Rodin.

Favourite digital artist?
Dan Milligan and Ashley Wood.

Are you a well-organised person?
By nature I'm not but I'm fighting it.

Last book you read?
Al Franken's The Truth.

Average time spent on an image?
Four to twelve hours.

Super power you'd most like to have?
I'd love to be able to turn ignorance into oil.

What's the first image you remember being truly awestruck by?
Tarkovsky - The Stalker. The opening scene when the camera is zooming in on couple and child sleeping in bed.

The single most important piece of professional advice you can give?
Talent is wildly overrated. The secret is in discipline and hard work.

Left- or right-handed?
Right.
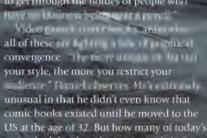
How would you describe your personality type?
You'll have to do that.

Favourite food?
Right now I'm really into Vietnamese noodle soup.

WARRIOR
Done as a break from painting environments.

GOLEM
One of Daniel's takes on heroes and villains.

his talent'."
However, laziness is beginning to trouble the creative industries. "Good-calibre talent is hard to find," says Daniel. "It's really hard to get through the hordes of people who have no talent who believe they are great artists.

Video games, comic books, animation — all of these are fighting a kind of practical convergence. The more unusual or formal your style, the more you restrict your audience," Daniel observes. He's curiously unusual in that he didn't even know that comic books existed until he moved to the US at the age of 32. But how many of today's artists had developed a mature style before they opened their first comic book?

POTATO SOUP

Somewhere along the line the goal ceased to be individual and became public property. It stopped being about perfecting your own style and became about who could do this style or that style the best. "I hope we are not falling into that trap," says Daniel, adding "Everyone says 'yeah, diversity is good', but I truly believe it." Art directors should be guardians of the only weapon we have against uniformity – difference.

Understanding and nurturing diversity – this is what art directors are for. "It defines my relationship to human beings and to my artists," says Daniel. He reassures us with a culinary analogy. "When you make potato soup, more goes into it than potatoes and water – there's all the spices and other stuff – but it's still called potato soup." Daniel believes an art director should define style by saying: "Hey, we'll be making potato soup. You guys throw in whatever you think it needs to make it yummy." Surely that must be a recipe for creative success.

DELTA TEMPLE
An inspirational piece setting the tone for a region and its culture in Guild Wars Nightfall.

WORKSHOP
CAST DOUBT ASIDE

Every artist has the occasional crisis of confidence when working on a piece. In our workshop Daniel explains the pains that accompany the creative process.

Artist PROFILE

Daniel Dociu
COUNTRY: US
CLIENTS: EA Games,
Wizards of the Coast
Microsoft, ArenaNet.

Born in Cluj,
capital of
Transylvania,
in 1957,
Daniel has
lived in America since
1991 and has been Art
Director at ArenaNet for
the past four years.
www.arenanet.com

Try it yourself
For all the files you need
for this tutorial, visit
www.imaginefx.com
and click on Downloads.
For a trial of Photoshop,
visit www.adobe.com

Photoshop

CAST DOUBT ASIDE

Daniel Dociu takes you on an honest journey through
the ups and downs of his image creation process

I t's Sunday morning. Sunrise
is still a few hours away. I'm
determined to get a lot done
today, as it will be a while
before I'll be able to get back to this piece
if I don't finish it in one session. I could
work from home, but I'm not sure I'd be
strong enough to resist the temptation
of the warm bed.

Nothing will wake you up like a
motorcycle ride to the office on a rainy

Seattle morning in February, though.
So here I am, itching to get my hands
on a chunk of charcoal the size of a
small brick and show this brand new
sketchpad who's the boss. I can't get dirty
during the week, there's meetings to
attend and appearances to keep…

But it isn't meant to happen. I realise
I had taken my tackle box with my
drawing supplies home and left it there!
It'll have to be all-digital again! Yes, I'm

disappointed. But it's right at this
moment when the defining idea for
this workshop strikes. Up to this point
I hadn't found an angle yet, nor had I
given it a fair share of thought.

I'll make it about exposing in all
honesty the ups and downs of the
process, about the struggle with the
inherent doubts and insecurities and
hopefully about succeeding to work
them into submission.

② Too early for chromatic commitment

I record it in broad strokes of a limited tonal range. My greys are warm. This is simply because I dislike neutral greys and for some reason I feel compelled to eventually take this piece into the red hues. But that can still change.

③ An attempt at coolness

In order to verify my instincts I might as well try a hue shift into the cool purples with a hint of complementary yellow in the bright areas. It has a definite mood to it, but it's not what I'm inclined towards today. I make a mental note to explore this direction more on another occasion.

① Warming up with some sketching

I start warming up by doing some sketching using a huge flat brush in Dissolve mode, with some texture to it, hardness turned up all the way. I'm not trying to fake a charcoal look, I'm just hoping that this way I'll get out of my system some of that unfulfilled appetite for the primitive materials. I have in mind some kind of a sci-fi setting but with a gritty look to it, some sort of [illegible] plant that depletes captured animals of any element.

It's an admittedly [illegible] look at best, and I'm okay with it: I'm not planning to [illegible] the look on [illegible] here, just to produce a reasonably impactful image.

PRO SECRETS

Selective Color
If I end up with a colour I'm not happy with, I use Image>Adjust>Selective Color. It is one of my favourite tools, as it enables me to operate on a colour by colour basis. I start by tweaking the neutrals, the whites and the blacks, making sure there is enough colour in them (pushing them away from a neutral greyscale).

④ And a sudden swing

Now I'll try to see how much heat I can handle. I find it rather [illegible] fixme, one-dimensional and predictable. At this stage I want to point out that I will not refer to any keyboard shortcuts in this workshop as I hardly use any, beyond a handful of the very basic ones. Some of them require such ridiculous contortions of the hand, if I had that kind of dexterity I'd be making a fortune as an accordion player in a polka band.

What I do in order to expedite the exploration of chromatic possibilities is use images with interesting gradients, non-linear ramps, radial transitions and so on, that I find in my reference folders. I run them through a blur filter (Motion or Radial Blur) cranked up all the way. I cycle through different layer modes and stick with the most promising results as a starting point. Occasionally I manipulate this layer, erasing or moving large blocks of colour around using the Clone Stamp tool.

⑤ More true colour

I toy for a short while with rather decisive hue variations. There's some merit to the experiment, but I quickly slide down the slippery slope of the gratuitous decorative. I also realise that [illegible] on I dropped the canopy I had in the original sketch, which provided a nice overhang, a strong compositional element. I'm too lazy to tackle this, at least for now. It'll be much later on in the process that I'd finally admit to the loss, bite the bullet and remember this key element!

6 Settling on the colour scheme

I revert to a more conventional juxtaposition of reds and yellows as dominant colours counteracted by some cool green and blue greys. It's awfully loud, but I deliberately keep the saturation up for now. If I get the colours to work together at full saturation, it's likely they'll work better still once I'll desaturate them at a later stage for atmospheric perspective.

7 Building up texture

At this point I work towards defining the various components from a material and level of technology standpoint. I have an idea of what I want, but I don't follow it stubbornly. I rather permit myself to be surprised by the unanticipated results of layering various photographic materials. The crudeness of the layering doesn't concern me yet; for now my priority is to find a treatment that improves things. This one appears to be the most diverse and random reference material. In fact, when scanning through my many folders of photos, I have a pretty good idea of what I want and what would work. Having built and used these folders for several years, I can always find what I look for fairly quickly.

8 A sombre premonition

While I continue to add texture and details, a familiar feeling is creeping in. The nagging suspicion that no amount of texture work will save this piece if I continue down this path. While I am intrigued by the concept of the suspended asteroid being butchered to pieces, I feel it deserves more thought and honest work than I'm willing to put into it right now. I should just abandon the idea and resurrect it later, on a day when I feel more disposed to overcome my intellectual laziness.

9 A last ditch effort

In an attempt to postpone the inevitable, I add a couple of elements intended to shift the focus of the piece away from the ill-fated processing plant. The first spaceship helps some, but the problem is deeper than that.

10 Recycling

This lot is all my about recycling bits and pieces from older illustrations of mine, provided that they don't infringe on any obscure copyrights clause. (As the majority of my work has been done as a staff artist, I don't own the rights to most pieces, therefore I have to be really careful about what I choose to recycle.) I cut and paste, resize, flip and manipulate the source material however I feel inclined, then pick a layer mode that helps it best integrate in the context. For colour adjustment my preferred tool is Image>Adjust>Selective Color. It enables limitless control on all the hues, especially when used in conjunction with Select>Color Range. A few brush strokes are needed to unify the implant with the background from a stylistic consistency standpoint.

11 Zooming out

It's time to bring the image's saturation down to a bearable level. Fogging out the distant element should also help with depth. It comes at the expense of things getting a little too chalky for my taste, though.

PRO SECRETS

Textures
To add texture I import an image that can be of a completely different nature with the right texture. I bring it into the top layer, play around with it until the positioning is about right, then I experiment with the layer modes.

12 Zooming in

In restoring some of the detail I'm not pursuing accuracy but rather an overall illusion of complexity. I don't want to cross the line of diminishing returns by overworking the piece, so long as I achieve the desired impact.

13 The inevitable hard decision

I decide to drop the doomed asteroid altogether. I wasn't doing it justice. Not this time anyway. I rework the tower towards this gritty, Chernobyl-like texture. I think this was the right thing to do; I wish I had done it sooner and saved myself all the trouble of searching for a patch in the wrong areas.

15 Props

"Props" to me drag on to a real feel for adding some human presence to establish scale. Once I posed these to though, I realised they were really over-scaled to left some of the necessary mood with a few loose brush strokes.

16 Epilogue

I chose to stop here. I did my finish it in one session or I could only finish I am my back to it several a day later...

like a boat at times but it does added art at break away from a direction that posed to the a dead end. If this was intended as an illustration for a book cover I would most obviously spend more time pointing over the given collage elements.

I treated the piece as I manage for a video game environment, which really is a shorter turnaround time and pushing techniques tools into it to get the idea across. I call it done.

14 Back to square one

In my new found appreciation for taking on my initial restore I bring back the content small roadway. The challenging part to me having it come the booting, which I decided to reflect find some with a higher level. Here are the settings Shape Dynamics Tex, Other Dynamics On Airbrush On, Position 50 percent, Spacing 1.

Rute Lima
LOCATION: Portugal
WEB: taiphen.deviantart.com
EMAIL: taiphen@yahoo.com
SOFTWARE: Photoshop

"Drawing is in my blood," says Rute. "It's always been a hobby of mine but it has grown too much to keep it as such." Not everyone sees the good side of this: "I have to say that it wasn't always seen as a good thing to do with my time by some of those around me."

Rute started out with non-digital media, "pen and plain old pencil being my favourites." Then, about four years ago, Rute discovered digital painting thanks to her graphic design course. The next part of the story will be familiar to many.

"All I've learned so far has been self-taught. I feel that this is the best way to find your own art and style. I often wonder what I would come out doing if I had attended art school."

Luckily, "fantasy worlds come easily to me. Somehow I always find myself connected to them, to their details and creativity." But even in the fantasy world Rute has a tendency to reason things out, "to create rules for that world so that things, although being different, can make sense not only for myself but for others as well."

1 COLOSSUS Rute created this concept piece for a Sony/Playstation contest: "The goal was to create a new colossus for the game Shadow of the Colossus II."

2 OF LOVE AND LIES More characters from the online creative writing club Mystical Lair.

IFX INSIGHT
"The title of this piece says it all... you can certainly see which of these characters is lying! I like the use of lighting from the right to create a shadow too."
Claire Howlett, Deputy Editor
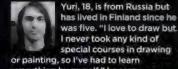
1

2

Yuri Yablokov

LOCATION: Finland
WEB: http://dekus.deviantart.com
EMAIL: miabloko@welho.com
SOFTWARE: Photoshop

Yuri, 18, is from Russia but has lived in Finland since he was five. "I love to draw but I never took any kind of special courses in drawing or painting, so I've had to learn everything by myself," he says.

Yuri is forward-looking, too: "I was always interested in the future. I love science fiction movies and I've got a lot of inspiration from movies such as Star Wars and Minority Report." Another passion is concept cars: "I like to design them and think of how they'd work."

Yuri was introduced to Photoshop when he was about 15. "At first, I just played with it by manipulating photos, then I got a bit more serious and moved to graphics." And while at secondary school he started to use it to make his own images.

Whether it's vector graphics, fractal art, photo manipulation or photography, Yuri loves them all. And, like a true artist, he tries to paint whenever he gets a chance. "I mostly paint science fiction, but I try some other genres as well."

1 FUTURE CITY This is one of Yuri's speed paintings. "In speed painting, you concentrate more on the idea and the concept than on whether the perspective is right and all the little details," he says.

2 DISCOVERING TRUTH Yuri created this piece for his art diploma: "A young researcher has found a bridge... but where does it go to?"

1

Robert Maschke
LOCATION: Germany
WEB: www.ragearts.com
EMAIL: airage@gmail.com
SOFTWARE: Photoshop

Robert, also known as aiRaGe, has loved to draw ever since he can remember. When he was young, the subject matter was comics. "Later, I started scribbling caricatures, monsters and foreign worlds in my school books – the usual stuff," he laughs.

The turning point came in early 2004, when he saw what was possible with digital/CG art. It was a revelation. "I was absolutely fascinated by the work of people like Greg Martin, Gary Tonge, Feng Zhu and Dylan Cole – just to name a few of them – and started to learn on my own."

Robert, now 22, hopes to be able to study somewhere in the future. "Until then I'm self-training as hard as I can and doing some little jobs on the side." His dream is to become a matte painter/concept artist in the entertainment industry.

Robert also wants to say a word of thanks "to all the amazing people on websites such as **ConceptArt.org** that offer workshops, sacrifice their time and do so much to support and help other artists".

1 **C5X** "This is a personal concept work, showing a highly developed civilisation," explains Robert. "It was painted in Photoshop."

2 **COREIGN** Depicting the aerial view over Coreign, this matte painting was done for a Star Wars fan film.

3 **PHENOMENON** Robert wanted to create some space art again "and pay a little homage to all the great space artists who got me started in digital art".

⊞ Silver Saaremäel
LOCATION: Finland
IFX USERNAME: Sept13
IFX PORTFOLIO: http://community.
imaginefx.com/fxpose/sept13s_
portfolio/default.aspx
EMAIL: sept13@gmail.com
SOFTWARE: Painter

"My favourite artists are Marko Djurdjevic, Michael Hussar and Kevin Llewellyn, who can really manifest their joy of creating into their paintings," says Silver, a 19-year-old student from Finland. He studies 3D and animation, but "I find it frustrating since I'm more passionate about painting and drawing, and I don't have an opportunity to study illustration in Finland." Silver's been drawing for a long time, "but I really got into practising hard about two years ago."

1 WARRIOR-ILLUSTRATION
"This was a study in technique as well as in my illustration and concept skills," says Silver. "The whole image from scratch to finish took about 16 to 20 hours working in Photoshop. I tried to find out how far I could go in black-and-white until incorporating colour and illustrative elements."

2 THE HEADHUNTER
Silver's inspiration came with the help of an ImagineFX favourite: "I learned a lot from Marko Djurdjevic's character creation DVD. Best lesson of all was how to use different patterns and textures."

3 LANDING PLATFORM
"Besides fantasy and post-apocalyptic themes, I'm a bitch for sci-fi too," laughs Silver. "Especially those ultra-futuristic very shiny cool spaceships that artists such as Sparth/Vyle/BARoNTiERi create. This piece was first a speed painting study of Vyle's speed painting DVD techniques, then later turned out to be a rendering marathon of about 20 hours."

1 ⬚ Christian Guldager

LOCATION: Denmark
IFX USERNAME: Kredepops
IFX PORTFOLIO: http://community.
imaginefx.com/fxpose/kredepopss_
portfolio/default.aspx
EMAIL: christianguldager@hotmail.com
SOFTWARE: Photoshop and Painter

Christian's day job is at Craftwork in Copenhagen, Denmark, but in his spare time he paints book covers. "I've been painting for roughly ten years – five years digital. I primarily use Painter IX.5 for painting and Photoshop for post-editing, colour correction and such."

Inspiration is always in plentiful supply for Christian: "My favourite artists include Drew Struzan, Craig Mullins, Ryan Church, Iain McCaig, Ralph McQuarrie, Daryl Mandryk, and a whole lot more."

1 JEANNE D'ESPACE "Jeanne d'Arc incarnated sometime in the future. She inspires and motivates the soldiers on the battlefield with her divine influence," explains Christian. "It started out as a simple portrait piece but then it grew and grew as I got new ideas. I painted it in Painter 8 and tweaked it quite a bit in Photoshop 7."

2 SHOOT "At work I usually have to draw cute and cuddly graphics, so often I feel the need to paint violent men shooting robots," Christian reveals, rather scarily. "I specifically wanted to mix some very painterly elements with some more comic book style elements in this piece, hence the 'Blam, Blam' sounds. It was painted primarily in Painter IX.5 and Photoshop."

3 COLONEL: Christian explains the story behind this image: "I've was inspired by the Hellboy comic story Wake the Devil, where a man in the Napoleonic army was allegedly a vampire. I liked the idea of some supernatural creature such as a vampire posing as an army colonel just to get a taste of enemy blood. I painted this without any reference in Photoshop using the Liquify brush a lot to mould his face into a shape that I was happy with."

Jakub Kujawa

LOCATION: Poland
WEB: www.kujawa-art.com
EMAIL: nail_85@tlen.pl
SOFTWARE: Painter

Born in 1985 in Poland, Jakub has "been painting and sketching ever since I remember." Today, after many years of practice, he's attending art school in Poznan, where he's focusing on 3D graphics. When he was 13, Jakub had classical painting lessons. "But a few years later I became interested in fantasy and SF illustration also, and now I'm working in it as a concept art designer and illustrator."

Although Jakub's role as a working artist means working with digital tools, "My favourites are classic media, such as oil painting."
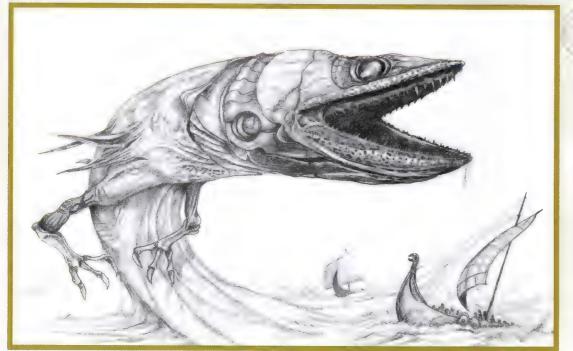
1 GHOST SHIP "This is a piece that I've made for a contest called Lying Things that's held in Poland," says Jakub. "I wanted a very mystic look in this one."

2 WHIRLPOOL For this one, Jakub want to create a mystic water queen. "She appears like she is practically built from water – look at her legs."

Anne Pogoda

LOCATION: Germany
WEB: http://azurelle.deviantart.com
SOFTWARE: Photoshop

Anne Pogoda, aka Azurelle on ImagineFX.com, is a designer and digital painter based in Berlin, Germany. She became the second ImagineFX.com weekly winner in December 2006.

1 LAGUZ "This image was inspired by a pencil sketch made by Petr Samberger from the Czech Republic," comments Anne. "I saw that drawing and found it so excellent that I asked him what he'd think if I made a painting of it. He liked the idea, and so I started thinking of a concept and tried out some colour palettes. Then I painted the Laguz within two days. It's one of those paintings which worked out pretty well and is still one of my personal favourites."

🇮🇹 Andrea Uderzo
LOCATION: Italy
WEB: http://andreauderzo.deviantart.
com/gallery/?order=9
EMAIL: andreauderzo@alice.it
SOFTWARE: Adobe Photoshop 7.0
JOB: Freelance illustrator

In November 2001 Andrea began working as a freelance illustrator and, until a couple of years ago, used traditional techniques, such as acrylic colours, ecoline and pencils. "Then I discovered the graphics tablet and digital colouring," he says.

Since 2003 Andrea has been collaborating as freelance illustrator with companies including Games Workshop, Black Library, Sabertooth Games, Privateer Press and Asterion Press, making illustrations for CCGs, and RPG and war games books and novels, always using digital art.

"My career has taken off in a big way in the last few years," says Andrea. "I hope to become a recognised artist in the field of fantastic art."

1 CADIAN PRIEST A sci-fi piece from the Dark Millennium CCG, published by Sabertooth Games in the USA. "Here there's a 'machine priest' with his servitors in the background."

2 DIRE AVENGERS Another sci-fi piece for the Dark Millennium CCG. "Warriors of an alien race, the Eldar, fight their way through a ruined city."
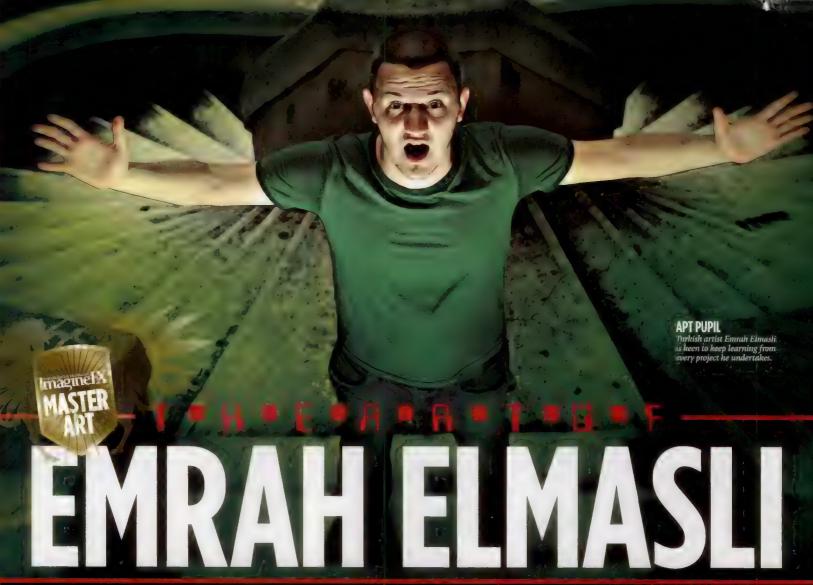
3 CRIPTA DIMENTICATA An internal illustration for the RPG book Creature del Terrore. Andrea says: "It depicts a dwarf in a typical dungeon, assaulted by magically animated abandoned old weapons."

APT PUPIL
Turkish artist Emrah Elmasli is keen to keep learning from every project he undertakes.

THE ART OF

EMRAH ELMASLI

For young Turkish artist Emrah Elmasli, progress is the watchword, as he aims to go further with every work that he creates

Something you quickly realise about a career in art is that it rarely makes promises up front. If you take a stroll through your nearest fashionable city district, the pavements won't be jammed with concept artists hanging around in designer suits, drinking latte outside flashy coffee houses. It takes a leap of faith to become an artist, greater than most other professions require.

Emrah Elmasli was at technical college in Istanbul when he turned the creative corner, so to speak. He remembers the day: "I stopped and thought, 'What am I doing here?'" Class books full of doodles and a head full of sci-fi daydreams were no longer enough. "I needed to do much more than this," he says, "That's

when I first realised that I wanted to make art for the rest of my life." Emrah left the tech and began to prepare for the fine arts faculty exams, which he says with endearing humility, "I was lucky enough to pass." It's often the case that the talented see their ability as 'luck' and for this reason the unluckiest people are often those playing against their own nature.

HOMING IN
Emrah chose to study Graphic Design and the diversity suited him well. "We had lots of classes like Illustration, industrial packaging design, animation, typography." Illustration was an easy choice, "but I couldn't find enough information at the school. So my biggest teacher was the internet."

University was not the final solution: "My education was all about advertising and graphic design," says Emrah. "There weren't any CG classes or teachers instructing how to paint." But by this point Emrah had momentum: "I've loved drawing since my childhood. In the university I continued to draw but it wasn't enough. I needed to go further. I wanted to do this as a profession but I didn't know how."

Another turning point comes to mind: "One day, I was looking at a magazine and I saw the digital paintings of Justin Sweet. That was the day I first said 'Yes! This is what I want to do!'" Then it all stepped up a gear: "I searched for information about digital painting, bought a graphic tablet and started to learn how to paint digitally."

FREELANCE GIGS
While he was still at university, Emrah began to land a few freelance jobs, but

ADIDASUIT
"I only visualise my own understanding of sci-fi," says Emrah. Adidasuit shows what he means.

VAULT 13
"I try to reflect a parallel future I create in my head," says Emrah. Vault 13 opens a door on one of those futures.

these weren't taking him in the right direction. "I was studying graphic design; this was what I could find as a job." It must have been difficult to pull away from the promise of paid creative work, but the likes of logo and web page design had the potential to trap young Emrah and he knew it, so "I searched the net for contract works."

After a short stint in the world of digital painting, Emrah picked up a few small commissions. "I was lucky and found some collectable card illustration gigs for Fantasy Flight Games," he says. It was a good enough beginning. "Afterwards, I did some conceptual work for an animation producer and it continued like that." It's a tough world out there, as Emrah notes: "You need to be lucky and ambitious if you're living in a non-EU country."

One thing's for certain: the web is bringing about a huge renaissance in digital creativity. By linking artists from around the world and providing novices with access to direct input from industry idols, a process of rapid development has been set in motion. Emrah observes: "I don't know what I would do if the internet didn't exist."

AN UNCHARTED WORLD

Something that grabs you about Emrah's work, particularly his recent pieces, is the strength of his colour sense. His ability to

> ❝ The important thing for me is to go further with every work I do, and to try new things. This is what I worry about ❞

choose, create and combine colours imparts to his images a lush immediacy that feels somehow exotic. Though he's glad of this observation, Emrah is keen to point out another guiding principle: realism. This is a fantastic vision, but the viewer must be able to see themselves within the picture, and colour is the bridge that enables this to happen. It's that 'what if' scenario again.

Above all, though, this young artist sees each image as a chance to develop and grow. "The important thing for me," he says, is to go further in every work I do, and to try new things." Self-improvement is the immediate goal, with increasingly real snapshots of a glittering alternate universe a highly desirable by-product. "Every time, this is what I worry about," he says.

Conscious that his career is a journey, Emrah has his eyes wide open: "Discovering new techniques, learning more about my profession is essential for me." These new things can then be passed on to the viewer so that we too can set foot on that same path. To that end, "I always try to reflect the new things I learn in my latest work." As a

case in point, Emrah observes: "Colour is like a big uncharted planet and I'm still discovering it."

ROOTS AND CULTURE

Not all his developments are discoveries, though; some are deliberate moves. "I'm trying to achieve a more oriental look in my sci-fi work these days," says Emrah, explaining the direction in which his painting is moving. "I love to overlap the Ottoman culture with science fiction elements." There may have been some classic science fiction works in the early days, "but I mixed them with my understanding of design."

The goal is to produce something original, something with a style of its own, and with that in mind, says Emrah, "I only visualise my own understanding of sci-fi." This desire for cultural expression comes out in both environments and characters, and could be a unique selling point. "I think that maybe I can differentiate from other digital artists this way," agrees Emrah, but his main point is more profound:

VULVA FIELDS
A personal project, Vulva Fields demonstrates not just great environment design, but the ability to conjure up an atmosphere with colour.

EMRAH • ELMASLI'S
ART IN FOCUS
The robot who's got a sweet side

Emrah had been brainstorming this character for months but it just wasn't happening. "I'm really fascinated by Ottoman culture, so I gave it another try." The hold-up was due to a question of scale – there wasn't just one character in there, it was a whole world. Once Emrah realised this, the Sherbetcibot was born, complete with world.

"'Sherbetci' is a historical Ottoman character who sells 'Sherbet' on the streets," explains an excited Emrah. "It's an Ottoman drink which is made of sugar," and this smart looking fellow keeps it in a reservoir on his back. "He pours it into a glass by leaning forwards."

Several sketches later, the bot, along with the rest of his world, is taking shape. "I'm thinking I'll call these bots Ottobots," adds Emrah. "I'm going to illustrate all of them and write a story about them."

AT PLAY
Emrah relaxing between paintings with a game of backgammon. He'll play with his ideas, as happened with the Sherbetcibot, until he's happy.

EMRAH ELMASLI

DATA FUTURE
This is Emrah's vision of Data Future, for Cosmos Magazine.

EMRAH ELMASLI'S
VITAL STATISTICS
He wants to read your mind...

Place of birth
The beautiful gulf city of Izmir, Turkey.

Date of birth
25 January 1982

Current location
Istanbul

Favourite music
Electronica, IDM (including Autechre, Plaid, Boards of Canada and so on)

Favourite traditional artist
Uhmm... there are many but I think it's Jean-Léon Gerome.

Favourite digital artist
Ryan Church.

First memory
I remember eating soil and dust from the ground when I was a little child.

Would you take the blue pill or the red one?
I'd take the red one for sure. I love discovering new things.

Average time spent on an image?
Four or five hours.

Super power you'd most like to have?
I'd like to be able to understand girls! Yeah, that should be a super power, isn't it? Like having x-ray vision or something... I don't mean visually, telepathically.

Is the truth out there?
Yeah, we're not alone. This huge universe shouldn't be a waste of space. I think I heard this line in the movie Contact. And it was damn right...

The single most important piece of professional advice
See your image as a whole. Don't zoom and over-detail it so early.

Left or right-handed
Right

If you were an animal, what would you be?
I think I would be a horse. They are noble and powerful animals.

ADVANCED PIG MAGE
Another fine piece of character design from Emrah's personal collection.

"I'm trying to return back to my culture, to my own vision and to my history."

That process of cultural propagation may become much easier in the future. Turkey is going through a creative surge, says Emrah, but in terms of digital art there's a long way to go. "Turkey is coming from way back." But, he thinks, this will change: "I believe that in 10 years, after getting into the EU, lots of Turkish artists will have the chance to work around the world." That's important because art itself needs this kind of input: without it, decadence sets in. "The cultural richness here," says Emrah, "is unique."

WHAT IF?

Even accounting for Emrah's perspective, his visions are still from a significantly different world. This, he explains, is about 'ifs'. "Generally I try to reflect a parallel future I imagine in my head." Not a linear progression from our own scenario, "but a future of the world built around some 'ifs'."

An example might help. "Like, what if there weren't any humans?" You take a starting point – a world without humans – then add a perspective: Ottoman. Follow that to its conclusion and you have the work of Emrah Elmasli, in concept at least.

Despite the concrete foundation that this recipe suggests, Emrah is happy to see his style as still evolving. "Some people say they can recognise my work any time they see it," he notes, "but I'm not that sure – I'm still learning." The direction of his work is towards realism, but a realism full of texture and life: "I like seeing brush strokes in my work," adds Emrah reassuringly. This speaks of a more complex relationship between artist and viewer, one that is too easily overlooked by digital artists overwhelmed by technical possibilities.

IT AIN'T WHAT YOU DO…

That's not to say that Emrah isn't aware of the technical possibilities that digital art presents. To produce work as engaging as his you need to master a technique and quickly assimilate it into your overall gameplan. Emrah is just very down-to-earth about it.

Saying "It's not something very complex" and "I use the same techniques that other digital artists use" obscures the main point, which is this: It's not what you do but the way that you do it. However, it's pretty much impossible to convey the latter, while the former is relatively simple: "I generally start with some pencil sketches."

CHALLENGING
Emrah's not one to sit back and relax. He's continually challenging himself, at the moment setting the goal of working faster every day.

The simplicity doesn't last, though; it's complicated endlessly by competing goals and ambitions, such as this one: "I'm trying to work faster every day." That means a gradual removal of unnecessary steps, and of safety nets, so the technique begins to feed back into the concept.

Once the sketch is solid, it's scanned, cleaned and redrawn before colours are added. "This part of the painting is the most important," says Emrah: "this is where the colours and light sources are determined." The rest is detailing. "Someday," he says with a smile, "I would like to be a mixture of Ryan Church, Carlos Huante and James Clyne. I love those artists." •

IN THE JUNGLE
This won high [...] in [...]

ALIEN PRIEST
The basis of a recent tutorial project, Emrah's Alien Priest doesn't look very much like an angel.

WORKSHOP
PAINT LIKE EMRAH ELMASLI

Discover how to create the coolest robot on the planet by following Emrah's step-by-step tutorial to designing a bad-ass robot and an oriental sci-fi world.

Photoshop
DESIGN AND PAINT ROBOT CONCEPTS

Discover the digital painting techniques and character design process needed to create a bad-ass robot and an oriental sci-fi world. **Emrah Elmasli** reveals how

Artist PROFILE

Emrah Elmasli
COUNTRY: Turkey
CLIENTS: Eidos, Cgtoolkit, Irrational

Emrah studied Graphic Design at Dokuz Eylul University Fine Arts Faculty. His works feature in Ballistic Publishing's Exposé, Painter and d'artiste Concept Art.
www.partycule.com

Try it yourself
For all the files you need, visit www.imaginefx.com and click on **Downloads**. For a trial of Photoshop, visit www.adobe.com

D igital painting is a common way of producing concept art at the present time. It's fast and functional in many ways. It's easy to produce many colour variations at a time and there's an easiness called 'Undo'. That's why many concept designers create their work digitally. But digital media can't help us in the creative process. It's a duty of the designer to find interesting ideas and turn them into something logical.

In this workshop, I'll try to explain the creation process of a conceptual character and the techniques that I use while illustrating it. One of the most important things that we need before starting is, of course, the brief. We have only two words for this brief: cool robot. At first it seems like a good theme and

you might say: "Yeah, I'll draw the coolest robot on earth!" But when you actually think about it, it's not that easy. If the brief gets shorter, the number of subjects that you need to think about increases. The best way is to start developing the very first idea that comes to your mind. I'm thinking of mixing science fiction with oriental elements. Ottoman Janissary soldiers would be interesting if I can turn them into something robotic. I've never seen anything like that so it could become a unique concept.

Using references is a necessity. I'll use some Janissary pictures that I found on the internet. Inspiration could be useful for ideas for the environment. I've already decided to illustrate the Janissary 'bot in an oriental environment. So, the
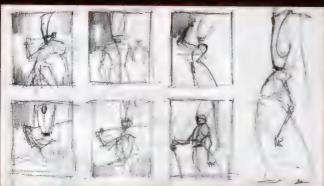
first name that comes to my mind is Jean-Léon Gérôme. He's a great painter and his works are really inspiring for me. We can use some of his paintings as references for the environments. Now, if you're ready, let's get started!

1 Doing sketches
Get out your sketchbooks! Doing sketches is essential for every creative process. You should discharge your thoughts on to the pages. Draw every single idea that comes to mind, even the simplest geometric shapes. Regarding references, Janissaries have long hats. I try

to stylise it to fit on a robot's head. The most important part will be the head area, so I pay more attention to there while drawing the sketches. I also do some compositional sketches. Putting the 'bot in front of a wooden door would be cool – like it's guarding the room or building behind it.

After doing some sketches and being happy with the results, I can now draw my main composition.

2 Main composition
Defining the main composition is a hard task. I should lay stress on the robot and give a little clue about the surrounding area at the same time. Viewers should focus on the robot, so the focal point will be on it. I'll define the focal point more while painting. I try to give the 'bot a calm and constant pose. Also giving him a powerful weapon like a

Gatling gun would be cool. It's not so futuristic but still powerful. This way, our 'bot will be really, really cool.

After drawing the pose, I can now scan it into Photoshop. I'll use Photoshop CS2 for the whole painting process. After scanning it, I desaturate the sketch (Image >Adjustments>Desaturate) and adjust the levels to make it black-and-white (Ctrl+L for PC, Command+L for Mac). With a normal, thin brush I start to draw the surrounding area. A wooden door, stone walls and pots are okay for now. Before starting to paint the scene, I put a texture to the background to break the white space a bit. It feels better than painting on a white canvas. Change the Layer Properties of your sketch to Multiply and put the Texture layer under it. Now we're ready for blocking in the colours.

Workshops

4 Detailing

The detailing process will not end until it comes to finishing the painting – it's a long process. I begin detailing by opening a new layer over the other layers and selecting a medium-sized chalk brush. We can start zooming to the areas that we want to render – see the picture above. As well as the head shape of the 'bot, I put a shape indicating a moustache under the eye, to give it a look similar to an Ottoman Janissary. Moustaches were common in Ottoman culture, so indications like this are always good when giving life to a robot.

5 Adding shadows

You should slowly add contrast to your image while painting. So, I add a new layer over the other layers and change its Layer Properties to Multiply. By selecting a medium-toned bluish grey, I can now add shadows to my painting. For focusing the eye over the robot, I put more darks in the corners of the image. I then deliberately have all of the highlighted areas together in the centre of the image. This is what I want to achieve for the general mood and lighting.

6 Defining the background shapes

While detailing the character, we must not forget the background. I start to define the basic shape of the walls by giving them more detail. It's a stone wall, so I start to create some stone texture. Little cracks and varying colours would give a nice feel of old, corroded stone. So, using a textured brush I apply some greens, blues and greys over the wall (see image below). After defining the basic shape of the wall, I also work more on the wooden door and the ground shapes (see image below left). When the painting is finished, all the materials should give the right feeling to the viewer: if it's stone, it should look and feel like stone. So, when painting a material, we should know all of its behaviours, such as light reflection, transparency and texture. Using reference is essential while painting materials – so don't be afraid of using them.

3 Blocking in the colours

This is an important step because we determine the main colour scheme of the painting. It's hard to return back after this step. You can adjust the hue and the colours but the temperature and direction of the light source will remain the same. Be sure about the colours before going into further detailing.

I want to establish a warm-coloured scene with a little blue in the shadows. So, as a first step I open a new layer and move it between the sketch and the texture layer. Now we're ready to paint. I take a bulky chalk brush and start to block the colours in. There's no need to go into minor details. Try to see the image as a whole in this step. Don't zoom. Work at 25 per cent zoom level. Determining the light source(s) is also a must in this step. If you have additional light sources, you should at least define the places of them.

I select the upper-right corner of the canvas as the light source direction and add my highlights regarding to that. The form of the robot's armour starts to become clearer. Also by giving a bright yellow to the cloth hanging down from his chest, we even started to think about the focal point of our painting.

7 Cloth texture
There are many materials to study in this workshop. Cloth is one, and the long cloth hanging down from the chest of our 'bot is a good element to work on. I want to give it a feel like satin: soft and shiny. So, I take a large, soft brush and start adding the details. The main colour is yellow but this cloth can reflect the surrounding colours, so it's good to add some orange to the lower areas.

9 Getting further in details
Since the robot is the focus of our painting, I detail it more than the background – especially the chest area. I want the viewers' eyes to lead directly to that area. More details equals more attraction. I also decided to give him a thin sword for a more dangerous look and to change his hand to look like he's holding it and ready for any hostilities.

Shortcuts
Color Balance
Ctrl + B (PC)
Command + B (Mac)
Use this shortcut to adjust Color Balance in Photoshop.

10 Oriental elements
To emphasise our robot's oriental environment we'll add some more objects. A water pipe would be great for that oriental feeling we're looking for. I paint it on to the stone on the left side and give it a bright, copper colour. Maybe it belongs to whoever lives behind that door. Who knows.

8 More shadows
Casting shadows is very important for the sense of depth in a painting. They also create contrast and define form. That's why I try to apply shadows several times. To make the form more believable I paint the shadow of the gun on the wall.

14 Adjustment Layers

We're almost done. One last step is to adjust the contrast, saturation and colours. I create some Adjustment Layers for this step (Layer>New Adjustment Layer). I need more contrast in my image, so I adjust the brightness and contrast a bit (Brightness -4, Contrast +4). Then I increase the saturation (Saturation +5). Lastly, I adjust the Color Balance and make the colours bluer and greener. I try to break the warmth by using some colder colours instead.

15 Finishing up

After these adjustments I check my painting and see if there are any more details needed. I decide to paint some ornaments on the armour of the 'bot as a final step and then finalise the painting. I've tried to explain my digital painting techniques in this workshop. I hope you like the process. Thanks for reading!

11 Armour and weapon details

Painting shiny armour and a detailed gun is time-consuming, but the final result is worth it. By painting light and colour reflections we can make them look even more alive. Bouncing light is one of the key elements in a painting. It's called radiosity and I apply it to many areas on the armour and gun. The warm colours of the background, in particular, must reflect on to our character.

12 Colour Dodge

There are some areas that I want to make shinier. The best way to do this is to use the Color Dodge feature. I add a new layer and change the properties of it to Color Dodge. Then I select a medium-toned blue and paint the eyes of the 'bot. Now they're brighter than before. Use this technique on the other areas that you want to make shinier.

13 Texture overlay

For the sake of realism, it's good to use real textures in some places. I want the background to be more detailed and rich in texture, so I open some wall texture photos that I took before and apply them over the background walls. I change the Layer Properties to Overlay to absorb the texture. Now we have a nice and rich feel on the walls.

Xavier Collette

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SOFTWARE: Photoshop
JOB: Concept artist, 10tacle

Xavier is modest about his talents: "I'm just a guy who has always drawn," he says. "After a brief attempt at studying science, the artistic part of me won, and I learned graphic design at ESA St-Luc art school in Liège, Belgium."

While at school, "I was always drawing, but not in a serious way, it took me a lot of time to say 'I want to be an illustrator'." But eventually that sentence took flight.

Today, imagination is Xavier's key function: "I'm trying to paint what I'm dreaming about, what I see, what I read, and all the things that are inspirations for me." It's a proper calling: "I hope I will do this until I die."

1 **MERMAID** "This is a concept of a mermaid made for a little contest, which it won."

2 **DRAGON** Xavier just wanted to draw a dragon, "in an original way. I hope it's good."

FXPosé

SHOWCASING PROFESSIONAL FANTASY ARTISTS

Olga Antonenko

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SOFTWARE: Photoshop, Painter, 3ds max
JOB: Matte painting/compositing artist, Cinema Postproduction department, Channel One Russia

Though she doesn't come from an artistic background – "my mother is an engineer and my father a serving soldier" – Olga's parents always encouraged their daughter's artistic nature. Now a seasoned pro, Olga has done practically everything: "sketches, concepts of backgrounds, modelling, texturing and compositing." Her schedule is hectic but she still finds time to relax with her family.

Olga's education started early. "When I was 10, I read in the Pionerskaya Pravda newspaper about qualifications for the best art school in Moscow." Having persuaded her mother that this was the place to go, Olga duly passed the exams and spent her school days where painting and drawing were as important a priority as reading and writing.

Olga subsequently graduated from the Moscow State Art Institute, where, she says, "we spent a lot of time painting from life, and I think that is very important. A real artist should capture lines, forms and shades which most people usually cannot see."

CG came to Olga's attention while she was still at the Institute. "I liked this sort of work because I had freedom with colours, composition and choice of details." Her enjoyment of the medium led to work as an artist on a TV programme, and it's been a beneficial working partnership. "My colleagues noticed that my scenes looked more realistic, atmospheric and alive," says Olga.

1 THE DEEP "Inspired by the BBC film about the inhabitants of the deep."

2 MOUNTAINPOLIS A matte painting done in Photoshop. "I wanted to create a beautiful image with a vast landscape," says Olga, "so when I began painting, I decided that it would be nice to add a mountain shaped and settled by people."

3 CITY AT THE WATERFALL Painted in Photoshop with a Wacom tablet, the City at the Waterfall is a city for the game W.E.L.L. online. Courtesy of Sibilant Interactive.

FXPosé

Nic Klein

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SOFTWARE: Painter 8/Photoshop CS2
JOB: Freelance illustrator

As a child Nic always liked to escape into his own world. "I would spend hours on end playing with LEGO, then I was into skateboarding pretty much exclusively for many years." At about 14 he discovered comics, and through that, he stumbled upon drawing.

This soon turned into a full-blown obsession. "And somewhere down the road when it was time to make up my mind about what I want to do after high school... there really wasn't a choice. At least not in my eyes. Art school."

Nic got into digital art very late, though: "I must've been 23 or 24. I lived together with other art school students, one of them moved out, and the new guy (Alex, now my friend) brought a Wacom Intuos with him and let me play with it. Four years later I have my own Wacom, and I can't imagine working without it!"

The pre-digital work remains very important, though. "I did things including printmaking, oil painting, monotypes, and a lot of mixed media drawing stuff, and I'm glad I did: it's the foundation on which I base my digital work." Nic lives in Germany, with his girlfriend, Katrin.

1 BATTLE Proposed cover for Nic's graphic novel Metropolis 7.0, a series of sci-fi short stories.

2 SCREAM It's always good to have a 'Plan B'. In this case it's a big knife.

3 SCHNELLSCHUESSE Cover for Vortex Publishing's Schnellschuesse book from the Unknown Armies series.

Michal Ivan

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SOFTWARE: Photoshop CS2
JOB: Art director for 10tacle studios, a games development company

Michal Ivan was born in 1982 and lives and works in Bratislava, Slovakia. His interest in sci-fi and fantasy art began while he was still at school. "In high school I started doing black-and-white illustrations for local sci-fi and fantasy magazine. That was when I fell in love with illustration."

After a while, Michal began experimenting with using colour. "I was painting with gouache and oil paints. I've done a few book covers this way," he says. But then he made a discovery: using a tablet, he began creating his artworks on a computer. "Mainly I use Photoshop to paint my pictures, but I try to use the same techniques as if painting with the traditional tools."

Nowadays Michal works full-time in a games development company, doing some concept designs, promotion illustration and some texturing. Even when he's not at work, he's still busy creating art.

1 BOGATYR Painting of Ilya Muromets, hero from old Russian legends. Michal intends for it to be used as a book cover. Painted in Photoshop.

2 FOREST WITCH This forest witch's face is entirely painted in Photoshop and the leaves are partially painted, partially photograph.

Reader

FXPosé

AND FINALLY, THE REST OF THE WORLD!

Wei Ming

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SOFTWARE: 3ds max, Photoshop

Ming was 10 years old when he first dreamt of becoming an artist. "'Just draw what you like to draw,' my mother told me. Thereupon I used my pen to create something new and build my world. My mum encouraged my passion."

When at high school, Ming received very formal and systematic training in modern industrial design. "I studied 3D animation by myself with solid painting skills, both of which intrigued me, though my understanding of design was still vague."

Studying abroad changed this, helping Ming see the real charm of this field. "Seeing so many high standard concept designers amazed me!"

① CONCEPT DESIGN "This is concept design with intense perspective. I start off with line drawing on paper, then bring it into Photoshop for colour rendering," says Ming.

② DARK LORD "The dark lord will judge whether spirits will enter Heaven, or will send them to Hell," explains Ming. "I got the inspiration from my favourite Spawn toy." The cloak was done in 3ds max while the whole environment is matte painting. Composition was done in Photoshop.

Artist crit

"As well as delicate detail of character, I can strongly feel the heavy air that surrounds that character. He has a strong pose and the colours (particularly the rising blaze) are strong too. I'm overwhelmed! This is a nice picture to look at, as it is scrupulously detailed and the artist's message is sincere."

Dénes Imre Nagy
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SOFTWARE: Photoshop CS2,
Illustrator CS2, Corel Painter IX

Whether watching Star Wars as a kid or being absorbed into the world of Tolkien as a young adult, Dénes has always been interested in science fiction and fantasy. "It's awesome," he says, "that the creativity all those people put into their film-making can inspire kids to one day do the same for the next generation."

He adds: "I've loved drawing creatures, characters and landscapes since an early age and now with the digital age, it's even easier and faster for people like myself to show what their imaginary worlds look like."

Dénes draws for Access Media, a textbook company, and does a little freelance illustration too. "I have only painted digitally in the last year and a half," he says, "but I'm having little 'happy accidents' along the way that make it interesting."

1 GENERAL UNION "This is the prelude to the final battle in a story I've worked on. The Sauron Army emerge from the smoke bombs to surprise the Arndom Coalition."

2 DRAGONSTAR ON DARK STALLION "This is a nightmarish vision of the demon Qeteb reborn in the body of DragonStar and riding his dark mount. His demon comrades are lurking in the distance."

"In Lost City, the incredible modern buildings seem to almost form a second mountain chain opposing the natural landscape behind them."

Marcelo Furquim,
Ex Art Editor, IFX

Chris Stoelting

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EMAIL: chris.stoelting@gmail.com
SOFTWARE: Photoshop, Terragen, Bryce, Illustrator, Apophysie.

As a youngster, Chris was exposed to many of the now classic science fiction movies and, together with his interest in possible other worlds, this helped form his love of sci-fi. "Art also started when I was very young," adds Chris, "from drawing fantasy dragons and demons to bizarre landscapes on other imagined planets."

His schoolbooks covered in various sketches and lacking in the actual schoolwork, Chris spent most of his time in the art labs. During this time Chris studied various computer subjects, including web design, and was finally introduced to digital art.

"The only previous exposure I had to digital art was drawing with MS Paint when I was 12 years old." With that in mind, Chris started out with the basics: "just the keyboard, mouse and an early version of Photoshop. Now I'm addicted to digital art, having upgraded to digital tablets and an arsenal of software."

1 PROVING GROUNDS "This planet's civilisation was destroyed thousands of years ago and lies in ruins, scattered among the strange land forms. Its tight mazed formations are now used to train fighter pilots."

2 LOST CITY With modern buildings mixed in among the older style structures, "Blade Runner had a large influence on this one."

Lisa Nicole Rye

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EMAIL: lisarye@gmail.com
SOFTWARE: Photoshop CS2

"It wasn't until I was introduced to Japanese animation and games in high school that I found something to focus my drawings on," says Lisa.
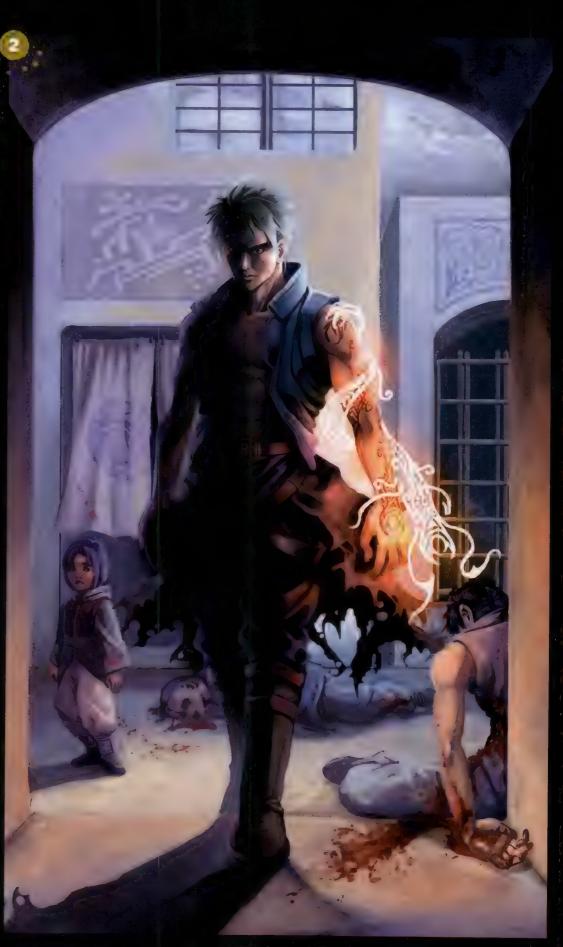
"I love Japan," Lisa declares. "I spent a year there on a student exchange program, so much of my art is influenced by Japanese styles." Anime is what Lisa started out with, "but more recently I've tried many different styles that are more realistic or abstract."
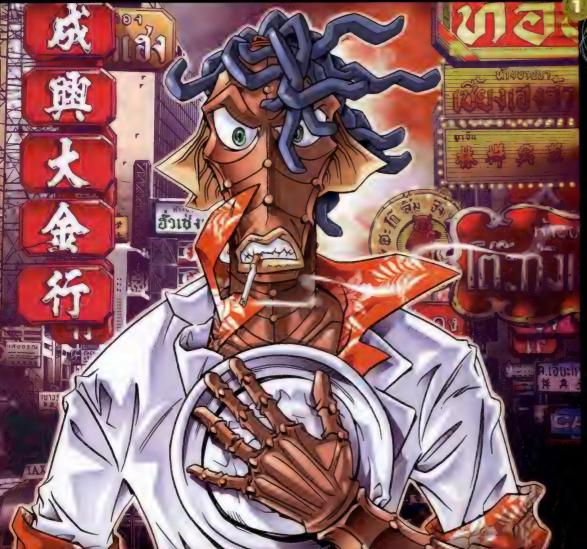
This new and varied approach is what keeps art so interesting for Lisa: "With every picture I do, I feel I learn something new."

1 TIME KEEPER Time is one of the themes that Lisa is drawn to. "I love mechanical wings, and I wanted to create a picture in which you could see a story unfolding."

2 SHADOW "I wanted a darker, more intense feel for this image," explains Lisa. But, like many of her pictures, the story behind the image is left open for the viewer to interpret.

Suttichart Sarapaiwanich

LOCATION: Thailand
WEB: www.geocities.com/ocjoepus/index.html
EMAIL: sea_cret@hotmail.com
SOFTWARE: Photoshop, Illustrator

Suttichart graduated from the decorative art faculty of Thailand's Silpakorn University in 1993 and immediately became the co-editor of Thai comic magazine a-comic. "I then spent two years as a graphic designer, but in 1999 I finally started work as a comic artist."

Suttichart created the Thai manga Joe the Sea-Cret Agent, printed in Katch, a teen fashion magazine. "The story's set in the future when all sea creatures have evolved to live with humans, and my main character, Joe, is a freelance detective in New York."

Also a freelance cartoonist and illustrator who's worked with the likes off Nike, Suttichart is "happy with my childhood dream career, a comic artist."

1 ANGRY JACKPOT An alternative cover for Suttichart's second manga book featuring Joe. "This guy is Jackpot, a seahorse character, and in the background is Yao-wa-rach, the Chinatown of Thailand."

2 S/28-29 This episode from Suttichart's comic is titled 'New York Summerland'. It has already been made into an animation.

IFX INSIGHT
"This piece features some inspired character design and storytelling. The mixture of styles works brilliantly, as well."
Rob Carney, Editor, IFX

The art of
SOA LEE

With creative vision and technical ability, Korean fantasy artist
Soa Lee strives for "dreamy visions, glamour, elegance and beauty..."

For Soa Lee, art is about more than just a final image. "Being a true artist requires more than observing and drawing," she cautions. "You must be able to evaluate the purpose and philosophy of the work." Soa believes there should be as much going on below the surface as there is on top of it, and that artists should train themselves to develop the vision to see things that are not tangible. It is this, she explains, that your audience is connecting with, if they are to make a connection at all.

That means a true artist is always effectively 'on duty'. "I try to relate everything I encounter in life to my work," says Soa. "I try to read, research and collect as much data as possible, to acquire indirect or vicarious experiences." And once she has collected them, they must be organised both externally and in her imagination. "I try to sleep well because sometimes I see perfectly combined imaginary worlds when I dream."

FINE ART OF SITTING DOWN

Soa's love of the arts dates back as far as she can remember. "I was always interested in all forms of the arts: fine arts, dancing and music," she enthuses. In her mid-teens this began to crystalise and focus into a love of drawing. Oddly enough, she explains, this was because "I was searching for an artistic activity that I could do while sitting down."

Pencil in hand, Soa began to explore her world, starting with the things closest to her – popular Korean singers. However, this

subject soon began to pale and before long Soa's eye began to wander. "Observing different objects to draw became more intriguing to me," she explains. There was a whole world out there to be discovered.

Soa had been handing out images of her favourite entertainers that she had drawn to friends. "It helped me to expand my social network," she says, "while improving my drawing abilities." The celebrity which this afforded also had the effect of deciding Soa's future major at college: Western fine arts.

FANTASY DREAMS

As well as Korean pop, the other thing that got the young Soa Lee excited was cartoons. "I loved any cartoons with fantasy themes," she beams. "They allow the audience to experience catharsis by releasing the desire and imaginations hidden inside." And as you might suspect, with these two passions, there were bound to be repercussions.

In Soa's case the upshot is that sometimes "even my dreams appear in fantasy theme when I sleep!" The nature of the reverie is, as you'd expect, revealing. "They're usually stories in which I protect Earth from intruders." Soa channels the energy into her work when she wakes up. "Perhaps they are the reasons that I enjoy sleeping so much," she adds with a smile.

Soa believes that fantasy art is nothing less than a shot in the arm for humankind; it's a sort of reprieve from the day-to-day need for order and logic in a chaotic

universe. "Fantasy themes provide a true escape and rest from reality," says Soa, explaining that as far as she sees it, there are very few limitations in a fantasy world because we make it as we want it.

"I fell in love with Japanimation as soon as I entered college," Soa adds. Given what we already know about her love of cartoons this isn't such a surprise, but the effect was an important one in terms of direction.

STRONG VISION
Artist Soa Lee, at home
in South Korea, resting her
eyes after a prolonged stint
with the ...
...of her

Artist
PROFILE

Soa Lee

AGE: 27
COUNTRY: South Korea
Soa has been a modeller and art director for game and animation companies. Now freelance, she works for online game and advertising companies.
SOFTWARE USED: 3ds max
WEB: www.soanala.com

AN ARCHER'S EYESIGHT
Soa brings her love of fantasy to the fore. Careful on that rock — it looks slippy and those shoes have no grip.

"The first piece that I thought was completely sensational was Akira," she explains. "Through seeing that, I was inspired to try to create a short animation of my own."

The need to raise funds for this project led Soa to her first job, teaching art to younger students during her holidays. At this point, it was just starting to become clear to Soa just how long her animation was going to take her when, in the following semester, someone let the cat out of the bag about 3D software. Soa breathlessly explains her discovery: "You could complete the entire production process with one computer if you used 3D graphics, without incurring extra costs!"

Despite this 'all in one' appeal, Soa had some reservations. "I was initially turned off by the sterile and organised look that can be typical of 3D work." The Achilles heel of 3D had come home to roost, perhaps. "These were the tools given to me, but I wanted to create images that were

and improve your results in 3D." The answer, it turned out, was to rack up those rendering skills. "From that moment," says Soa, "I tried to create the final image using only 3D renderers."

A bold move, perhaps, but even a cursory glance through Soa's work shows that her research paid off. There's a rapid falling away of sterility from her figures that has already borne some wonderful fruit, particularly in her Zodiacal series of images. She's willing to admit that although the process is time-consuming, the results are worth it. "What made it possible was focusing on the artistic aspect more than the technical."

However, 3D work is nothing if not technical, so this side had to be taken into account too. "So before I commence work, I always evaluate what skill sets must be upgraded," says the practically-minded Soa.

In practical terms, though, a 3D artist has to be willing to engage new challenges with every piece that they create.

"Examples might be details of lips and eyes that you haven't done before, or creating objects you've never tried," says Soa. The ground is constantly shifting beneath your feet when you create with polygons and pixels.

As a countermeasure against all the technicalities, Soa always starts new pieces in her sketchbook. "I draw the overall shape first, then focus on designing the details that I'd like to emphasise." This approach ensures that you remain faithful to the original idea. "I use my imagination during the sketching stage," notes Soa. Then it's time to flip brain modes over and begin conjuring with geometry.

❝ You could complete the entire production process with one computer, without incurring extra costs! ❞

pretty and picturesque instead." Soa had a steep learning curve ahead of her.

IT'S ALL IN THE RENDER

3D software brought Soa's project closer in theory, but simultaneously put it out of reach in terms of lack of tools. Remaining resolute and combining work with experimentation, the would-be animator began to evaluate ways in which to paint pictures in 3D while working on A3, the online game, in 2002. This was still just the beginning, though. "I was heavily dependent on Photoshop to fix the images because I wasn't skilled in global illumination or caustic effects," she says.

The situation was far from satisfactory, and after much deliberation "I finally worked out the most effective way to edit

IN THE PINK
Soa's amazing artistry skills overcome the frigidity sometimes associated with 3D.

Soa Lee's ART IN FOCUS
Riding Zeus from cartoon to realism

"For a month," says Soa, "I just focused on Europa." 3D isn't like sketching, or even painting, it works on a different time scale altogether, so it's no surprise to learn that "this Zodiacal series has a lot of meaning for me."

For her depiction of Taurus, Soa turned to Greek mythology. "This scene shows Zeus as a bull with Europa seated on his back, running through the ocean."

"I wanted to express skin more realistically. I wanted to

study V-ray properly. I wanted a training exercise."

The aim here was not simply the production of a final image but a visible improvement, a notable progress on.

In Taurus, the waves were a texturing breakthrough, as is Europa's skin, and there's a feeling of momentum which is exceptionally hard to capture.

This piece, heavy in research, was pivotal in Soa's development. "It's my transitional image," she notes, "from cartoon into realism."

IDENTITY THEFT

Soa certainly has the dedication needed to succeed. Eventually, she gave up her lucrative game illustration job in order to train herself to 3D perfection. The vehicle for this task is her 'Twelve constellations project'. And with Gemini currently rising above the creative horizon, Soa has turned her attention to that quintessentially 3D concern – "devising a better pipeline."

But vertices alone won't pay the bills, so Soa continues to work on a freelance basis for online games companies, advertising and board games. Relationships with these firms, she adds, should result in a win-win situation. The client gets something that helps fulfil their ambitions and Soa makes something beautiful, which has always been her goal: "dreamy visions, glamour, elegance and beauty."

The contrast with some of her less scrupulous admirers is shocking. "It's fantastic to hear that the people would like to keep my images on their hard drives," says Soa with endearing humility. But she realises that not everyone is just a keen collector, some are on the take. "Once I even discovered a person had created a homepage in which she was posing as me!"

HOLLYWOOD SEOUL

Soa remains philosophical. "I have a soft spot for people who love my works," she says. That relationship is important to her: "Knowing that my works provide special

EUROPA
The beautiful Europa, who came to a somewhat sticky end.

meaning to someone gives me a vital power as an artist." That power might soon be enough to run a small town – Korea is a crazy place for digital art these days.

"Just as Hollywood's movie business provides job opportunities to CG professionals in the US, the games industry is serving a similar role in Korea," explains Soa. A new generation of digital artists is emerging, equipped not just with the necessary skills and abilities, but with the flexibility required by such a rapidly evolving world.

New companies spring up, and of course they need artists. "This environment is fostering some great 3D work," observes

REDYAN
Redyan, a character from A3, the online game. An early commission for Soa.

Soa. "I truly believe that 3D is the ideal tool to describe sci-fi most effectively."

ECSTATIC GRATIFICATION

Soa's idiosyncratic development illustrates just why a Korean creative resurgence is so likely. "In the late 20th century," she says, "when I was first learning 3D graphics, I was influenced by the demands of the environment, and my passion was to create beautiful and feminine work."

Soa could have chosen to create other people's visions, but "I was young and I didn't want to be trapped as a puppet in a mundane reality." She made a daring decision to go it alone, and you can't help but admire her for it, although to be fair this is not just a story of a single artist's determination, this is also a story set against the backdrop of a hungry industry.

Soa wanted an adventure and that's what she got. "And when I realised that I delivered what the public wanted, I found myself in a state of ecstatic gratification." Ever since then, "I've been able to show more conviction and expand on my philosophy in every work." There's a connection here which produces exotic results. ●

Soa Lee's VITAL STATISTICS
The truth is out there

Age
27.

Country
South Korea

Favourite traditional artist
Gustav Klimt, Alphonse Mucha, William Bouguereau, Luis Loyo.

Favourite digital artist
Linda Bergkvist, Pascal Blanche.

Favourite music
New age music, classical music, meditation (yoga) music, electronica.

Super power you'd most like to have
A presentiment of what might lie ahead.

First memory
I heard a musical box sound as I was lying down looking out the dark window as a baby.

Would you take the blue pill or the red one?
I would take the red, as it is my

goal to search for the purpose of my existence.

Average time spent on an image
It all depends on the type of work I'm doing – typically about a month apiece.

Is the truth out there?
Of course! I am confident of its existence, as I believe that it is my duty to describe and depict the truth that exists somewhere out there.

Single most important piece of professional advice
Try not to pursue the money but make it pursue you. The best way is to find a kind of work that you really love and enjoy, and then the money will come.

Left or right-handed
Right-handed.

If you were an animal, what would you be?
I think I would most like to fly as a bird.

3ds max

CREATE BEAUTIFUL FAIRIES IN 3D

Breathe some life into your characters with this guide to 3D techniques. Soa Lee helps give your creations some soul...

Artist PROFILE

Soa Lee
COUNTRY: South Korea
CLIENTS: Nexon, Actoz, LGad, ELSA, Beverly Enterprises and others.

Soa has been a modeller and art director for game and animation companies. Now freelance, she works for online games and advertising companies. www.soanala.com

Try it yourself
For all the files you need, visit www.imaginefx.com and click on Downloads.
SOFTWARE
For a fully working 30-day trial of 3ds max, visit http://usa.autodesk.com and click the link at the right-hand side of the screen. You can also download a free version of the Brazil renderer, Brazil V2 Rio, by visiting http://splutterfish.com

Nature is an incredible and splendid thing. We take it for granted as we study and look at objects. It's easy to recreate nature using modern 3D graphics tools. Even better, we can create the kind of images that we're accustomed to seeing in the real world – but with a fantasy twist. For this workshop, I'll be using 3ds max 7 and Brazil RS 1.2.2 (see box at left for how to get trials of these).

My production work in 3D is divided into several steps. It may seem as simple as overlapping the realistic textures over the objects, but the reality is more complicated. 3D programs enable us to put the characters we've created into a living, breathing world. We have to use our inquisitiveness and observation to depict the world our character lives in.

A perfect combination of texture maps, texture quality, rendering and lighting enables the realistic portrayal of objects and characters. Each of these topics above is extensive enough in itself to have books written about it – so I recommend you research them all thoroughly if you're serious about creating 3D art. What I'm going to do here is to walk you through my production of a 3D character's face. Then you can tackle the rest on your own!

1 Concept creation and sketch

Imagine a beautiful nymph on a cool beach. I can picture her with webbed feet, tentacles and pallid skin. A necklace made of clamshell as well as a fish-scale-shaped pendant would look nice on her, too. Also, tiny pearl accessories would complement her perfectly. 3D Illustrations are drawn via a structured plan – the modelling process and texture creation steps that take place between the initial and final touch-up stages require a rational brain rather than a creative one. The initial sketching stage that we're about to undertake, therefore, must use the creative part of the brain, and our sketches must be very detailed.
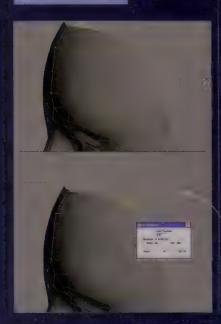
2 Fundamental modelling

I'm using the ON_Start.max file that you can download (see box above left). This contains a facial image that already has eyes and a nose. You control only one half of the face, as the other side is created symmetrically – using the

Shortcuts
Render options
F10 Window that enables adjustment of render.
F9 Skips the adjusting options step, enabling a quick save of the latest render.
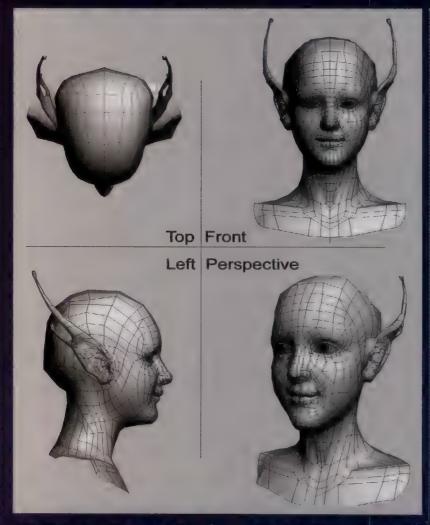
Symmetry modifier. 3ds max modelling is similar to knitting, in a way. You 'knit' multiple faces by copying edges and joining them together – by selecting multiple edges while pressing Ctrl+Shift along the vertical Z-axis. You may encounter unconnected vertices while 'knitting' but don't worry – you can connect them with Weld Vertices tool. Now you'll have two sides to your face.
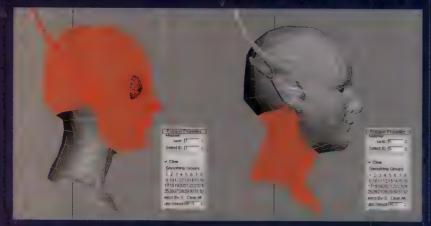
3 Turbosmooth

The Turbosmooth modifier is excellent for quickly adding extra detail and smoothing geometry. I've used an 'Iteration' setting of 1.

Top | Front

Left | Perspective

the ID to 1. After selecting the neck area, set the ID to 5. I'm creating an image that shows the upper body, so the area below the chin is an ideal place to hide from the camera.

6 UVW mapping

I select ID 1 (face) and apply UVW Mapping from the modifier list while selecting Cylindric for mapping type. This creates cylinder-shaped coordinates that surround the face.

7 Edit UVWs

While applying Edit UVWs, I look at the unfolded facial map by pressing the Edit button. Some of these map coordinates may be tangled up. Edit UVWs helps you to modify and clean up the maps. Select the area to be modified using Selection Modes>Face Mode. The edges next to the faces will be highlighted in blue. Cut out the faces using Ctrl+B and move them over to the blue area. Weld the points connected with Selection Modes> Vertex mode using Ctrl+W. Using the Tools>Relax feature enables me to unfold tangled faces.

4 Finishing the modelling

I complete the face by knitting surfaces. The model should consist only of quads and tris, with the tris being in well-hidden regions. This is necessary to minimise the errors when exporting the mesh to ZBrush (if you use it). The triangular poly creates pinches, which makes the mesh feel bumpy.

5 Establish coordinates

Now, let's create textures and put them on the face. Appropriate coordinates and IDs must be assigned to put textures over the face properly. Right-click on Symmetry then select Collapse To. This leaves Edit Poly with symmetry applied – I'm doing this to sort out the history. Select Facial Polygon in Edit Poly and set

PRO SECRETS

Recovering from crashes

Sometimes, max crashes when trying to render for print (at more than 4,000 pixels). This is a major dilemma if you're pressed for time and the completed work isn't ready for rendering. If this happens, you can try a 'crop' rendering technique. Think of it like stitching the final render together in Photoshop after you've rendered separate images.

8 Creating texture

I produce a texture map file in Photoshop that's more than 2,000 pixels high. Then I draw an appropriate face with the wire frame from Edit UVWs. Initially, the diffuse map (see the source file nym_faceDi.jpg) handles colours for such things as make-up or detailed moles, freckles, the colour of the lips and so on. If you're a beginner at texture painting, it's fine to combine picture images of body parts. I recommend, however, that you delete the shades. I complete the texture and save it as a JPG (it could also be saved as TIFF). I then apply this image in the Diffuse box of the Material Editor and edit UVWs using Unwrap UVWs. There's no correct order in which to do this process. You can edit UVWs in max first and then draw the map in Photoshop.

9 Producing the texture

Bump map and Specular map (source files er_faceBp.jpg and er_faceSp

.jpg) control the texture in the greyscale type.

It's easy to create a bump map if the chroma of the completed Diffuse map is reduced. The dark areas appear to be dipped, while the brighter areas pop out at you, so I make sure the moles, eyebrows and hair edges are brighter than the facial skin so that they really do stand out. The Specular map can be used to control the oiliness of different areas of the skin on the face. Because the Specular map is very sensitive to brightness, I make sure that the overall map is a little bit darker. Typically, the nose and forehead must be brighter than the rest because they're the oilier areas of the face. They usually turn out to be very oily with the completed map, so I tend to reduce the output/RGB level after I've created the texture that I want.

10 Choose the renderer

You must choose the best type of renderer for creating materials with max. Newer renderers come with GI (Global Illumination) as a basic option. I select Brazil Renderer, because it enables the Sub Surface Scatter (SSS) effect, which gives more realistic light penetration. I find the skin texture more realistic.

11 Skin material

After selecting facial surfaces from Editable Poly>Polygon, I choose the basic material from the Material Editor. I change this texture's standard to Brazil Advanced and select Base Shader>Skin. I apply my Diffuse map over the Basic Surface Properties/Colour, and then apply my Bump map file to Bump and set the level to 13. Next, I insert the Specular map.

12 Lips

It's easier to control the lips and skin separately, so I assign a separate ID (ID 2) for the character's lips, and use a different type of texture from the skin. The basic material is identical to that of the skin; however, the lips appear shiny because the Bump is stronger and the Specular map is brightened.

13 Rendering

I bring up my Render screen by pressing F10, then select Brazil (Assign Renderer>Production) as the renderer. I select Renderer>Brazil>Image sampling as PS2, and check Sky Light from the direct illumination options of Luma Server. Then I run the rendering by pressing Render button. My character's face doesn't stand out, and even the Sky Light's basic mono colours create bluish and dull effects. So I activate Sub-Surface Effects (Renderer>Luma Server), and then click Enable and set Global Scale to 2.5 and Sample Rate to 5. After this, the nose tip and ears will appear brighter when I render. To make them stand out more, I decide to create a spotlight targeting the character. First, I set the Shadow as Brazil Ray Shadows while selecting intensity level of 0.3. I select Disc Area for the Shadow's General mode and set the area sampling as 20. This increases the size of the shadow because the distance between the Shadow and objects become larger.

14 Eye material

Now, let's breathe in some life and soul into the dull eyes. The eyes are composed of two layers. The inner eyeball makes the pupil look 3D and

helps determine eye colour. The outer layer, such as cornea, serves a crucial role in reflecting the images. I select Brazil Glass for the outer layer and apply my HDRI image on the Environment map in Reflection Parameter. In order to maximise the reflection on the eyes, the IOR value must be raised twice and HDRI map's offset (U:1.55, V:-0.07) as well as tiling (U:0.6, V:0.7) must be adjusted so

that light from the HDRI is captured in the eyes. Now, let's resume the rendering. After the HDRI is applied, the reflective features help the eyes to twinkle more.

15 Render HDRI

HDRI images have more luminance data stored than other image formats. I apply an HDRI image in the Sky Light Map (Renderer>Luma Server>Sky Light>None), then drag this HDRI image into the Material Editor slot.

16 Finishing touches

I raise the RGB level in the Output to 7.5 and play around with the settings for Offset and Tiling. During this process, you can estimate what will be affected by the HDRI image's light locations.

PRO SECRETS

Save files during stages

Don't imagine you can finish the whole job in one file. You must keep saving with different file names at different stages. Be especially sure to do this after making a big change, such as collapsing or working on skins. This enables you to refer back to the original object or the old file if your modifications don't go as you plan. This is the clear advantage of digital over traditional drawing when it comes to modifications.

| MODELING | TEXTURING | EDIT | DETAIL | PROCESS SKETCH |

Feng Xun
LOCATION: China
WEB: www.conceptart.org/forums/
showthread.php?t=91505
EMAIL: phoezix@hotmail.com
SOFTWARE: Photoshop CS2

Currently working in the games and movie industry, Xun has a varied visual diet: "I love both Occidental and Chinese culture," he says. "They move me so much."

It's clear from his work that Xun has a deep connection with his subjects but he makes the true nature of his depictions clear when he says that "I love the feeling of suffering, loneliness, dread, mad pretension and malevolence..."

These sentiments, so Xun believes, "offer another way to show the aesthetic feeling, and it's this that I'm trying to catch with my work."

Xun learned stage design while at university, and he uses his theatre skills to great effect in his fantasy images: "I like to light my pictures theatrically."

1 DEMONS A dream-inspired image, which, says Xun, was helped by music, which "makes me crazy..."

2 DRAK DUKE Even the undead have a hierarchy – meet the Drak Duke.

3 DEITY The drama of this piece is inescapable. "The inspiration," says Xun, "came from Tibetan T'angka and Chinese carvings of great antiquity."

▊ Terence Koh
LOCATION: Singapore
WEB: www.slothstudio.com
EMAIL: terence@slothstudio.com
SOFTWARE: Photoshop

"I always enjoy the satisfaction of doodling in my sketchbook wherever I go," says Terence, "to interpret my own version of the surroundings and subjects that inspire me."

Terence is a devoted artist, and the introduction of digital techniques opened a whole new direction for him: "It makes the process of converting my sketches to finished artworks quick but doesn't lose the feeling I have for the piece." Add to this the obvious editing power and you're hooked.

Terence is currently working on both commercial and personal projects via slothstudio.com, his site, and 4playz. net, a collaboration of artists and comic artists, which includes t-shirt silkscreen design, illustrations and comics.

1 KERA MUSE #10 In collaboration with 4playz's Soccer Mania Series. "Kera smokes on the field, swears like there's no tomorrow, and headbutts the referee."

2 JIAN (SWORD) "Everything and everyone is created to serve its purpose and destiny. Tinted with the ever-lasting thirst for war and blood, the bedevilled host travels endlessly to seek stronger challengers."

Hamish Owen Manton

LOCATION: Australia
WEB: haemoncul.deviantart.com
EMAIL: christianethics@gmail.com
SOFTWARE: Photoshop CS, Maya

Hamish had his biography written by his online fanclub. This is the result: "For 8,000 millennia, Hamish sat and meditated in the cosmos, dreaming of perfection. In the swirling space-vapours, He came to know a true art, so perfect as to set him at peace with the universe.

"Rejoicing in this new-found bliss, Hamish alighted upon Earth to share this flawless vision with mere mortals. Unfortunately, the market was already oversaturated, and so Hamish resigned himself to drawing shiny space things that went pew-pew. Now at the age of 18 he humbly strives to master his new art with the knowledge that all energy flows according to the whims of the great magnet."

1 CTHULHU FHTAGN A piece based upon the tabletop game Battlefleet Gothic. "An unimaginably massive and ever evolving bio-craft devours a lone space cruiser, its tentacles pumping it full of necleonic mutagens."

2 TURNCOAT Based upon the Eve-Online universe. "A heavy assault cruiser brings its guns to bear on a fellow freedom fighter, betraying everything their race has struggled for over the past century in a furious hail of high velocity auto-cannon rounds."

Kim Bussiahn
LOCATION: South Africa
WEB: kitty-cat-angel.deviantart.com
EMAIL: kittycatangel@gmail.com
SOFTWARE: Photoshop CS

"Well," says Kim, "I've been drawing my whole life really. There's no time where I 'got into' art." From the moment she could pick up a pencil, drawing was what it was all about.

"I started by copying pictures freehand and learned most of my technique from other artists in doing so." Then it came time for Kim to find a direction of her own: "I stopped at about the age of 15."

When it comes to subject matter, Kim has an eye for many different genres, "although I am quite partial to fanart because I get a feeling of accomplishment when I can successfully interpret another person's character in my own way."

And as far as influences go, "I'd say it ranges from everyday life, to the human body, to Marvel Comics, and to anime. I really try to find beauty in everything, even if my work is mostly cartoons."

1 FLYING HIGH "This was originally a Kiriban thankyou picture, but I think it works nicely on its own."

2 BREAKDOWN "This is what happens when I have no money for Christmas presents," says Kim. "Fanart of my boyfriend's favourite anime character."

Reader FX Posé
THE PLACE TO SHARE YOUR DIGITAL ART

Jesse Daniel Cutler
LOCATION: Australia
WEB: http://dypsomaniart.deviantart.com
EMAIL: jesse@dypsomaniart.com.au
SOFTWARE: Photoshop CS2

Jesse started digitally painting after doing an airbrushing course in 2004. The goal was to provide a reference for subsequently airbrushing a final piece, "but once I discovered the power and freedom of the digital medium, I packed up my airbrush and began learning everything I could about digital painting."

Jesse's collection of instructional books and magazines have taught him a lot but he's also been inspired by video game artwork and traditional artists, including his favourites Boris Vallejo and Julie Bell. "And of course all the awesome artists on DeviantArt and CGSociety," he adds. A love of fantasy and sci-fi came from reading great authors, such as Terry Goodkind and Raymond E Feist.

Currently working as a freelance illustrator, "doing everything from vehicle graphics and logos to custom fantasy portraits and comics", Jesse is also in the process of writing his own illustrated novel.

1 WEREWOLF This image started as just a quick sketch: "I wanted to capture a feral, scary-looking werewolf." But, satisfied with the sketch, Jesse decided to have a go at detailing it properly. "Needless to say, the hair took me bloody forever!"

2 HOT PURSUIT "The characters for this piece are from a short story I was working on, but it was mainly just a practice piece."

3 SEMI-NAKED WARRIOR GIRL An early example of Jesse's digital endeavours, this image has been called Semi-Naked Warrior Girl "just because I couldn't think of a better title."

IFX INSIGHT
"Eek! This werewolf is a terrifying but beautifully painted creature, and the detail that's gone into the creature's fur is brilliant. A scary piece indeed."
Kay Inglis,
Production Editor

Leonardo M Giron
LOCATION: Philippines
WEB: http://s2ka.deviantart.com
EMAIL: stuka1212@yahoo.com.ph
SOFTWARE: Photoshop CS2, Painter

Leonardo was born in December 1975 in Malabon city, a residential and industrial municipality north of Manila. "I began drawing at an early age," he says, "and made simple sequential art inspired by sci-fi robot anime TV series in my high school years."

Following his natural inclinations Leonardo took a four year fine arts course majoring in Advertising Arts at university in Caloocan. However, "I have gained most of my artistic know-how from more than 10 years of experience as a textbook illustrator for a small design studio in Quezon City.

"I enjoy drawing science fantasy and science fiction themes," adds Leonardo, "getting inspiration from many great artists from western superheroes and European fantasy, to Japanese mangakas."
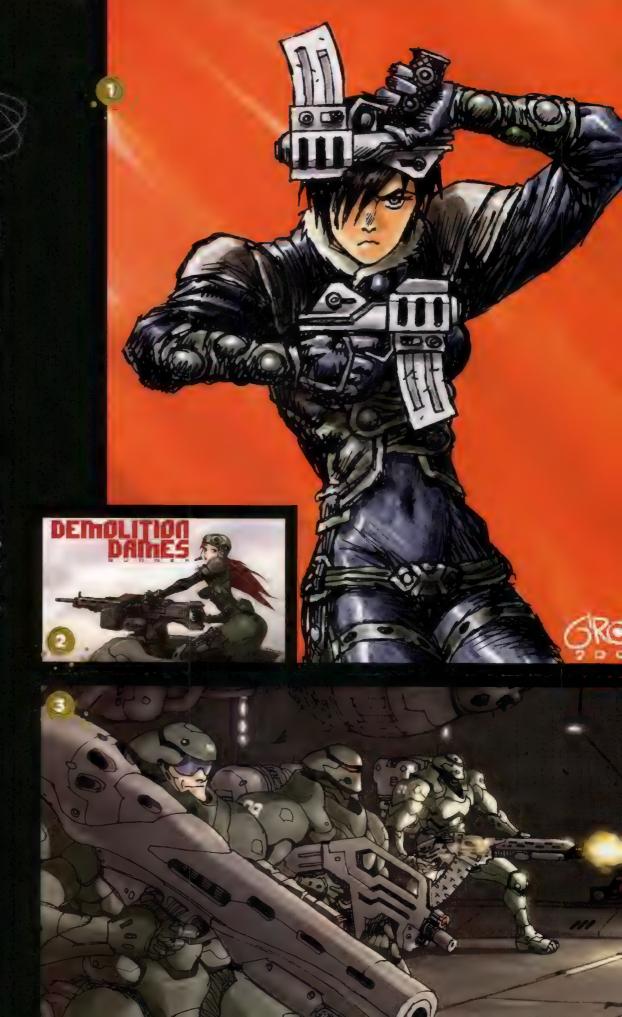
1 ZYRILLE "This is one of the characters from an indie comic book I did in 2004," says Leonardo. "I used a sketchy style ink drawing and coloured this using Painter 5.5 Watercolour brushes."

2 DD TURRET GUNNER "This is one of a series of conceptual character designs for an all-female tank crew I call Demolition Dames." A pencil sketch tweaked and coloured in Photoshop CS2 with a photograph for background.

3 DD INFANTRY "A futuristic armoured infantry, complete with high power weaponry." The ink outlines were done using a regular gel pen. These were then scanned and cel shaded in Photoshop with lighting effects and a cooling photo filter.

IFX INSIGHT

"DD Turret Gunner is an interesting pose, especially for someone who is operating such a big gun. The recoil would give her a bad back, but this image has a great action manga feel."
**Tom Rudderham,
DVD Editor**

Diana Lea Fegen
LOCATION: South Africa
WEB: dianafegen@mweb.co.za
EMAIL: danlopillustration@gmail.com
SOFTWARE: Painter IX, Photoshop CS2

Diana only began working with digital art six months ago when she bought her first Wacom tablet. Already there's trouble at the ranch: "The problem is that my husband and I are both artists, and we have to compromise with 'joint custody' of the tablet!"
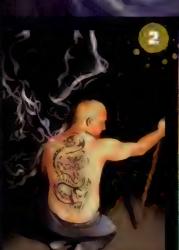
Diana comes from a family of artists, and this has some difficult consequences: "They feel no shame in criticising any imperfections that they might see." Diana started out with Painter IX and "slowly but surely I've started to get more confidence in Photoshop and have done my last few pieces exclusively in it."

Initially a bit hesitant about doing everything digitally, Diana maintained a death-grip on her detailed pencil drawings, which were scanned in and then coloured. "This has now fallen away, and I find myself more willing to start from scratch on the computer." Soon to be emigrating to Canada, Diana hopes to get involved in the fantasy digital art community, and attend some of the conventions in North America.

1 THE HERMIT The Hermit is a spiritual guide who holds the lantern over the darkened path. "He's a hard taskmaster, but has a soft, nurturing side."

2 THE HIEROPHANT "The Hierophant is the priest, a connection between the divine and the mortal domains. He's a shape shifter, and transverses the dimensions with ease."

3 THE WORLD This image is based on the myth of Shiva and Kali: "They dance as the creative force that brings the world into existence, but also teach the perils of over-indulgence."

IFX INSIGHT
"The Hermit is a great image. The lighting and skin wrinkles give this piece an eerie realism. I particularly like his sneaky expression – I wonder what he's up to?"
Tom Rudderham, DVD Editor

The art of DEHONG HE

With **Dehong He**, fantasy art regains its purpose: he helps us grapple with the human condition by picturing a universe that's rich with human meaning...

hat makes the work of Dehong He compelling is that man has a meaningful role at the centre of a world alive with mythological significance. Whether it's among battling dragons or raging seas, there's always a story to be gleaned, one with grand scale and human implications.

"Fantasy," he says, "gives me the biggest possible stage to work with. It's as if you're God, you can create a new world."

TRUTH AND BEAUTY

"Everything seems true." Dehong is talking about the need for fantasy art to retain a sense of coherence. Without this, the fantasy is lost and the image becomes something else – surreal, absurd or even just annoying. "When everything is in accordance, " he explains, "It can be fantastic too."

What's needed is the ability to create a snapshot, taken at a decisive moment, in an alternative universe. But to do that you have to create another reality, one called forth only for the purpose of that snap. It's weirdly elliptical; everything hinges on what kind of worlds you can call up. "But, of course, when the image is finished, it will make a deeper impression."

This isn't the first time Dehong has made a deep impression on people. "When I was seven I became a famous star in my town," he recalls, telling the story with obvious pleasure. "I was very interested in some paintings my parents bought for New Year." They made such an impression on the youngster that he had no truck with the usual childhood pastimes: "I spent most of my time imitating them instead of playing."

The paintings themselves were of "amazing stuff – beautiful ladies, Chinese dragons, deer, flowers, birds and peafowl". Dehong's parents backed their tiny artist all the way. "They stopped buying New Year pictures, and just hung my paintings on the wall for New Year."

Naturally, the young star went on to study fine art at university; meanwhile, his tastes shifted towards fantasy art via comic books. "I did some work for a comic company when I was still in school," recalls Dehong. "After I graduated, I drew comics for a year." Then it was over to games, where he began working as a concept artist.

ORGANIC APPROACH

Dehong began to notice his style developing, but promised himself never to interfere with this process. "I let it develop freely," he says. "I liked comics, so my early works had an intense comic book style." Subsequently, interest in CG has led the charge stylistically.

"I put my work's quality and the themes which I express first," Dehong explains. "Style comes second. With the ➤➤

ORC
As this wolf-bourne orc demonstrates, all that time drawing comic books has given Dehong a powerful ability to create convincing characters.

TEMPERANCE
Dehong's tarot series continues to evolve. "I love this project," he beams. "And I redesigned this angel to make her ears become wings."

THE JOURNEY BEGINS

An award-winning image is born

➤➤passage of time, I think, my own style will emerge naturally."

Dehong extends this organic approach to the creation of new work. So, for example, "when I created a new image I often forgot to use a set process." Each image somehow found its own way from his head on to the screen. This has had consequences, though. "Because I haven't cultivated good habits in this respect, and I put all my energy into painting effects, I've neglected to develop a set process." This has been brought home by his latest job: "I now have to care about setting processes on account of the fact that I'm producing a book about painting!"

One thing this artist won't succumb to is the temptation of laziness. Preferring to broaden his skills rather than rely on those already acquired, "I often attempt to create a new image that's different from previous ones, and which captures a new feeling."

It's a noble ambition, and one that requires perseverance. "Although it may be harder, it will give you a new enthusiasm and a sense of success," adds Dehong enthusiastically. "To draw a new story, study a new colour, a new texture or painting skill – these are the privileges of the artist."

STORYTELLING SKILL

Another privilege is that of telling stories. Not every artist likes to do so, but Dehong relishes it. "Almost all my images have a story," he emphasises. Partly as a motivator and a guide, the story acts as a substructure around which the artist then builds an image.

The story itself is the seed: "It may be partly from my former work in comics.

THE LIGHT OF LIFE
"The life of a moth is short and sad. They live in darkness; looking for the flame is their only goal."

HERO
As with this magazine cover, the fantasy artist must be able to suggest an entire story with just one look.

Some of them are long, some of them short." The main thing is that they inspire the artist. "I always think over a theme and a story to express before I create a new image," insists Dehong. "It's helpful when organising the tableau – everything can be derived from that central theme."

Dehong sees no contradiction in then taming his narrative flame by adding: "Some images are only used to express the texture or action for figure designs." And in a way that's what's important – just going with the flow. Not in a complacent way, but rather feeling the direction things are going and really leaning into it.

LIFE IS ART

The underlying message Dehong wants to convey is this: "Art comes originally from life." Inspiration may come from games, ➤➤

VITAL STATISTICS
Dehong talks dragons and disorganisation

Full name
Dehong He.

Date of birth
June 21, 1982.

Current location
Jilin City, China.

Favourite music
New Age and pop.

Favourite traditional artist?
Alm Tadema, Jan Vermeer, Jean Joseph Benjamin Constant, Adolph von Menzel, Yifei Chen, Huahan Liu.

Favourite digital artist
Craig Mullins, Dusso, John Wallin Liberto.

Are you well-organised?
I don't like to be well-organised – although I used to think that if everything was in order, life would be better.

Average time spent on an image?
Between one week and one month.

Superpower you'd most like to have?
I wish I could stop time!

What's the first image you were truly awestruck by?
My father's drawing of a dragon. Although he's not artist, just a carpenter.

Most important piece of professional advice?
Don't worry about your painting skills, just relax yourself and feel it.

Favourite food?
Chinese food.

DREAM OF VAJRA

He's golden and resplendent

Back in 2004 Dehong discovered a Chinese dance called the Thousand-hand Bodhisattva. "From then on I had a dream of painting a picture based on Buddha," he says.

The thousand hands in question belong to a column of 21 dancers moving their arms in perfect time to produce a vision of the enlightened being Bodhisattva. The dream was re-awakened when two things collided: a cover commission from a Chinese fantasy magazine and a book on the Vajra, a Buddhist thunderbolt that destroys ignorance.

"I studied those books a long time," says Dehong. "And, although I'm an atheist I still love them." Eventually this hybrid character emerged. "He has six arms on the upper half of his golden body, three heads, and two legs."

films or comics but, "if you observe everything around you, you'll find that you can freely imagine a small story and a tableau based on them."

That leads to the often divisive question of visual reference. For a comic book artist, Dehong finds himself on the wrong side of the fence: "A person's memory is so limited that he cannot remember all the details of everything," he says. Reference is essential.

Even if you're not working out a story, the real world should be closely observed for its textures and structures. "Usually," says Dehong, "I like collecting pictures from the internet. First, I collect the textures that I would like to draw. Next, I'll combine them and study them." And then there are the past masters: "I often look at traditional oil paintings of the famous artists and try to figure out their way of handling things." Most problems aren't original, only the solutions are.

GLOBAL CONNECTIONS

This lesson is something China is finding out at this moment in time, making conditions far from ideal for artists. "China is not a very good place for illustrators" says Dehong. "But it is a place developing at full speed."

// I always think over a theme and a story to express before I create a new image. Everything can be derived from that central theme //

Most Chinese illustrators depend on game developers for a stable income, and after that comes books and animation: it's a bit like a creative Wild West. There's one important difference, though: the internet has been there from the start. "We are in a big country," observes Dehong, "but the internet shortens the distance between us."

"In my daydreams," the artist goes on, "I often want to write my own plays, direct films and create games." As China continues to barrel into the future, its artists will be carried along for good or bad. The fact that they have lines of communication open and can therefore support and encourage one another will enable artists such as Dehong to imagine more freely.

Photoshop
PAINTING POSEIDON'S WRATH

Dehong He shows you how to create an image of ocean adventures

W

1 Sketch

I start by putting my main focal point on the 'golden section' of the picture, to give readers a more attractive vision. The image falls into three parts: near, mid and far distance. The wave need not be drawn completely, because it will be more defined when we add colour.

2 Concept colour

I create a new layer, then set the Blending mode to Multiply and add the picture's general colours. Next I create another layer and set the Blending mode to Hard Light. Paint a cool colour such as blue on the shadow areas and add warm colours such as yellow or red on the bright part. Although I'm going to draw fierce fighting, I still want to show the beautiful side of the sea. He is always gentle before you offend him, and this will be the focus of the work.

3 Spindrift

Use the brush and the Smudge tool to daub some spots freely, then create a new brush, setting the Angle Jitter of Shape Dynamics to 40 per cent in Brush Presets. Then add a new layer on the image and feel free to draw spindrift (spray blown from the sea's surface) with different-sized brushes.

4 More details

Time to add more details. According to the light's distribution and the flowing wave's direction, I touch up the picture and define the wave's shape clearly. I adjust the horse's direction to draw the eye toward the upper-right corner, as the story is going to take place from this point.

5 Characters

I add the four tomb robbers in detail. Although they look tiny compared with the sea, they're still the vital human beings that are different from nature. I paint them with warm colours, to contrast with the general cool colours. They represent a potential, these tiny beings, but have an irresistible strength to contend with in the shape of nature. In this way, we're all contradictions, full of advantages and shortcomings. When we create something, we destroy a lot.

6 Wave

Add a new layer and choose a lighter colour to draw ripples on the surface of the wave in order to make the seawater have a sense of transparency, as if the water is gushing out. Here I use the Smudge tools a lot and choose the brush from them to adjust the strength to 95 per cent.

Artist PROFILE

Dehong He

AGE: 25
COUNTRY: China
CLIENT LIST: Beijing Cartoon Magazine Fly Fantasy World Magazine, CGworld Magazine, Kung Long International
URL: www.hdhcg.com

Dehong is a 2D artist with three years' experience in comics and four years' experience of work for game companies, comic studios and film studios. In July 2006 he won first prize in the CGSociety's 'CGChallenge XIX: The Journey Begins' competition.

Try it yourself

For all the files you need, visit our site at www. imaginefx.com and click on Downloads. For a trial of Photoshop, visit www.adobe.com

Chester Ocampo
LOCATION: Philippines
WEB: www.imaginaryfs.com
EMAIL: chester@imaginaryfs.com
SOFTWARE: Photoshop CS2

Chester has been drawing ever since he was a kid, "taking inspiration from comics, cartoons, toys, andchildhood daydreams." A little older and he got engrossed in video games. Comics, however, remain Chester's first love.

Chester is proud of the fact that he's self-taught, "although part of me wonders what I could have achieved with formal art training." Six years ago he got acquainted with Photoshop, "but it wasn't until a few years later that I started making artworks straight on to the computer, with a pen tablet."

1 AMBER CRESCENDO "If war can be likened to a complex dance, then warriors are in essence deadly dancers," Chester says.

2 OROBOROS "Everything evens out eventually," says Chester. This piece is "the result of playing with more binary opposition concepts than I know what to do with."

3 ARA TWO POINT OH Originally, this piece was called The Superfluous Anecdotes of a Post-Apocalyptic Third World Teenage Drama Queen, "which pretty much sums up my plans for her in terms of story and setting."

Artist crit

Artist Aly Fell explains why he likes Chester's work

"Chester has a strong design sense, and uses composition and graphical elements with confidence and dexterity. His characterisation is very strong as well."

Sam Hart
LOCATION: Brazil
WEB: www.samhartgraphics.com
EMAIL: samhart@samhartgraphics.com
SOFTWARE: Photoshop, Poser

"After years of doing 3D illustrations and diagrams, I've finally worked my way back to my first love," says Sam. That love is comics.

Sam's return to the comic book sees him drawing Starship Troopers: Blaze of Glory and Brothers – The Fall Of Lucifer for Markosia Comics. "And I'm now experimenting with doing totally digital artwork," he adds.

Sketching the scenes in Poser and doing all the linework in Photoshop, Sam's got an interesting workflow on the slab. "It has the advantage that the lines can be continually refined – from sketch, to rough figures, to final art," he explains.

1 ROBIN HOOD PAGE A page from Sam's next project, to be released by Walker Books later this year: a graphic novel called Robin Hood: Outlaw's Pride.

2 STARSHIP TROOPERS 2 The second of Sam's covers for the Starship Troopers series: once again, digital over ink artwork.

IFX INSIGHT

"Sam has a great gift for narrative and conveying a sense of impending danger. These two pieces are fantastic examples of accomplished comic art."
Marcelo Furquim, Ex Art Editor, IFX

William Xiaobaosg
LOCATION: Singapore
WEB: http://xiaobaosg.deviantart.
com, www.4playz.net
EMAIL: xiaobaosg@gmail.com
SOFTWARE: Photoshop, Flash

"I believe in creating something out of nothing as an artist." William has a philosophical outlook but he's also happy to smile at himself: "I see myself as a kidult."

A talented amateur illustrator, William began learning his art a couple of years ago, while working freelance in Singapore. "Beside that I'm also doing some personal commission work on the side, via 4playz, a collaboration of two illustrators and a comic artist." Strongly influenced by the Japanese and Chinese cultures, William gets his inspiration from many sources: movies, posters, comics, music "and generally, all the things that happen around me."

William creates his artworks using vector-based line art, which he then finishes in Photoshop to achieve the proper colour balance and that wonderful textured feel.

1 RED DRAGON A collaboration artwork with a team member known as Sloth. "Red Dragon, the female warrior Samurai of the East, with a mixture of Western and Eastern style."

2 HANAMI "Vintage or retro designs are naturally among my favourite topics," explains William. "Here I tried to explore and capture the raw style and feel by using their colour palettes and textures."

Chen Lin

LOCATION: China
WEB: http://wanbao.deviantart.com/
EMAIL: snow_lc126@hotmail.com
SOFTWARE: Photoshop

Lin only started working with CG in 2005 and, thanks to his rapid development, in 2006 he joined Webzen China as a background designer.

"In my spare time I like to paint scientific and fantastic objects," say Lin. These include fanciful and futuristic aircraft and, of course, aliens, "but I also like building models." This, he says, "helps me understand the structures before I paint them. I love painting and I will keep working on it."

1 THE STATION Painted for a science book. "Draw a shape first and copy it, engage with it, then change it based on the perspective. Then burn in and dodge out until it feels natural."

2 FIGHTING DRAGON "The magician was defending against the flame of the dragon by using his powerful magic shield, but he didn't know that there was another dragon lurking under the cave." One of Lin's friends said that this painting reminded him of a scene in a Mario Brothers game.

3 CITYSCAPE The inspiration for this painting came from a model that Lin had made previously: "I painted this future cityscape based on a photograph," he adds.

4 THE BODY SHOP An aircraft is in the process of being repaired. For this Lin looked at a lot of aircraft photos as references, "and these big arms refer to the machinery that I saw."

FXPosé

Gino Acevedo
LOCATION: New Zealand
WEB: www.wetaworkshop.co.nz
EMAIL: gino@wetaworkshop.co.nz
SOFTWARE: Maya, Mudbox, Studiopaint
JOB: Liaison between Weta Workshop and Weta Digital

Weta Workshop's Richard Taylor originally approached Gino to work on King Kong. However, when that project fell through, Gino was offered a different opportunity: "They wanted me to be a part of Lord of the Rings."

At this point Gino was still a fully analog type of guy. "I was brought over to supervise the special make-up effects for the creatures – their noses, elf ears and hobbit feet." While working on a silicone body of the dead Boromir, however, Gino met Joe Letteri, Visual Effects Supervisor. "Joe wanted to know how I painted the silicone with the airbrush to make it look translucent like real flesh."

Joe asked if Gino would do some texture painting on Gollum. "I said, 'Hmm, not sure, me and computers don't really get along!'" However, Joe promised him a great tutor, texture painter Sergei Nevshupov, and a new digital artist was born: "I loved how you could make your own colour palette and never run out of paint," says Gino. "But I do miss the fumes!"

Adapting his traditional airbrush technique, Gino treated the digital creature as if it was a silicone model. This seemed to work pretty well: "I remember seeing the first turntable and was blown away! It looked like my painted silicone head. The way that the light was coming through the back of the ear was incredible, yet it was all digital!" From that point on, Gino became the liaison between Weta Workshop and Weta Digital.

1 ATTACK TROLL Concept design for the Attack Troll complete with Peter Jackson-approved helmet by Alan Lee. Gino worked on the colour design for both the troll and his headgear.

2 FELLBEAST Peter Jackson-approved colour concept design for the Fellbeast.

3 GOLLUM In this Photoshop piece, showing a beaten-up Gollum getting ready for his Mordor scenes, Gino demonstrates why he is the airbrush maestro.

☼ Andrew Hou

LOCATION: South Korea
IFX USERNAME: nJoo
IFX PORTFOLIO: http://community.
imaginefx.com/fxpose/njoos_portfolio
EMAIL: n-joo@hotmail.com
SOFTWARE: Photoshop

Andrew was born in Canada, but currently lives in South Korea, where he works as a concept artist at Webzen Games. While he always enjoyed doodling when he was young, he studied computer science at university, "before realising that it was just too boring. I quit to flip burgers for a year while deciding the next stage of my life," says Andrew. Soon he decided to give art another shot, so studied Classical Animation at Sheridan College of Art and Design. Inspired greatly by Capcom artists, Andrew is also a big fan of the fantasy genre and artists. His career started in the comic industry at Udon Comics and by doing various freelancing work. "I'm probably best known for my part in Street Fighter comics and fantasy-genre D&D illustrations," he says.

1 MATSU NIMURO OF THE LION CLAN "This was a commission piece based on a character from the Legend of the Five Rings Trading Card Game," explains Andrew. "The former Lion Clan Champion, leader of the largest military force in the empire, turned into a nameless wandering ronin. I was always a big fan of samurai and ninja – it was great fun working on this image!"

2 SMOKING FREAK "Here's a piece that's probably from a darker, twisted part of my brain. He's a true freak of nature. A smoking freak," says Andrew. "He lies on his mountain of cigarettes, cigarette butts and ashes, and is blinded from the years of burning smoke. His fingers are slowly rotting away and his leg is disembodied at the knee from constantly ashing his cigarette on to his knees. His purpose is unknown, though rumours are that long ago he used to be an artist..."

3 SAGE'S NAP Here we see the sage napping in a tall-backed chair among his books. "This was a piece I did a while back for Paizo Publishing," says Andrew. "Usually I don't like my older work once time passes, but this remains one of my more satisfying pieces. Things just seemed to work out while I was painting it."

Sanjana Baijnath

LOCATION: New Zealand
IFX USERNAME: Visionspring
IFX PORTFOLIO: http://community.
imaginefx.com/fxpose/visionsprings
_portfolio
EMAIL: sanjana@nilut.com
SOFTWARE: Painter 7 and Photoshop

Sanjana began her digital journey with Photoshop about nine years ago, but never really warmed to it. "However," she says, "I fell in love with the medium and truly realised what it had to offer when I discovered Painter software about four years ago. Nowadays I use Painter 7 for 90 per cent of my work." Her list of favourite artists is quite a mix: "At the top of the list are the Dutch master Frans Hals (I love his bold brushstrokes), Jason Chan (a master at capturing mood and narrative), and Patrick Reilly (he has a sketchbook in the ImagineFX forums... wonderful creatures!)."

1 VEX HARROW – AUTUMN This was a commission for a US-based author called Kyt Dotson, featuring the central character from her works of fiction. Sanjana explains: "Vex is a modern-day mage of the Goth persuasion and she's drawing the magical sigil for autumn. The image was painted over a three-day period, mostly using the Oil Pastel and Palette Knife tools in Painter 7."

2 FAIRY CATCHER "The Fairy Catcher is a menacing creature who feeds off the magic of fairies, who she catches with her antlers," Sanjana explains. This image was created using the Oil Pastel tool in Painter 7. "It's a speed painting done over a four-hour period, and the aim was to quickly capture overall mood and personality."

3 LIFT OFF This was one of the first figures that Sanjana painted in Painter 7. "This did take quite some time – about six days in total, working on and off," she says. "I mostly used the Opaque Round brush, Palette Knife and Grainy Water tools, and the overall composition went through a number of changes. In the end, I wanted to create an image that tells a story and invites the viewer to speculate."

EXPosé

Tyshan James Carey

LOCATION: Australia
WEB: http://tycarey.deviantart.com
EMAIL: tyshan@netspace.net.au
SOFTWARE: Painter, Photoshop, FreeHand MX, Maya
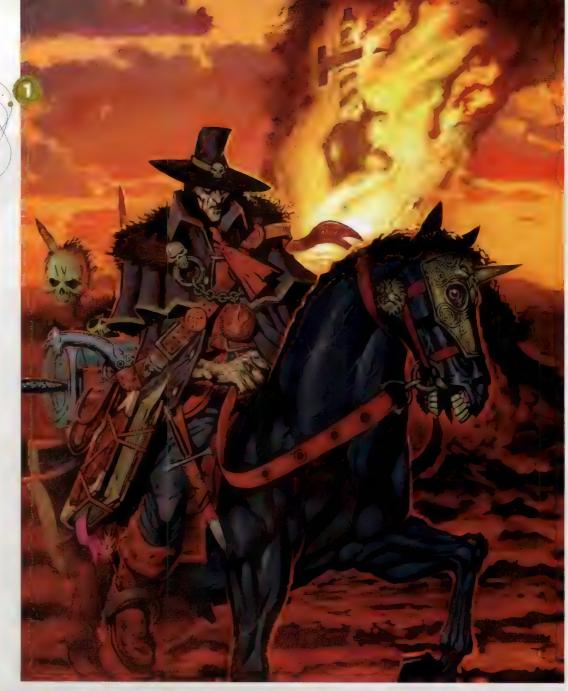**JOB:** Art Director at Torus Games

After six years of making computer games for GBA, PC, PS2, PSP, DS and XBox, Ty Carey is very happy to find himself an Art Director at Torus Games, Melbourne, Australia. The previous half decade saw his former incarnation working professionally in graphic design, "a time that seems rather murky to me now," he says.

"I always preferred drawing monsters to page layout," says Ty, "so I jumped at the chance to move into the video game industry." Starting out as a humble texture artist, "I slowly worked my way to Art Director as the old ones passed away." Now at work he hogs as much of the concepting work as he can to himself, while on the home front dodges his domestic duties in order to sketch, paint and play games.
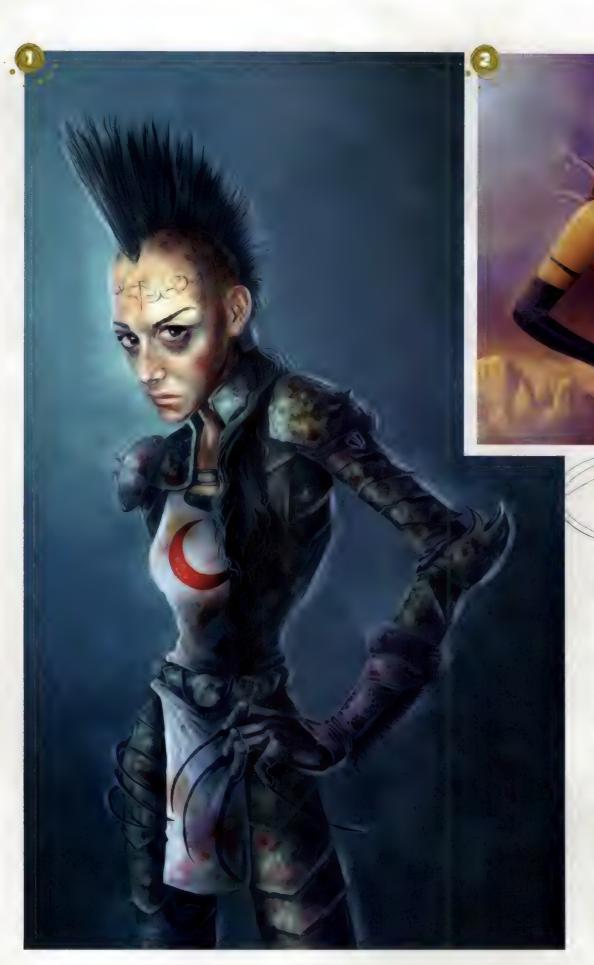
1 HUNTER Commissioned for a Warhammer FRP book, this image shows a Witchfinder General and his toasting victim. "It started as rough digital concepts which were narrowed down, and then used to make an outline sketch on paper for the overall composition. The pencils were scanned, and then the process of building up the image began, going back and forwards from Photoshop to Painter."

2 EVE "I wanted to depict the epic universe of Games Workshop's Warhammer40k in a very cinematic way," explains Ty. "I also wanted to create a different ambience to the usual blast-fest you get in these images, so I chose to go for a more serene, contemplative ambience."

Sanjana Baijnath

LOCATION: New Zealand
WEB: www.sanjanasart.com
EMAIL: sanjana@nilut.com
SOFTWARE: Painter 7
JOB: Freelance Illustrator

"It was only in the late 1980s, when I was about eight years old, that I first became intrigued by the digital medium.

"I spent many hours drawing cartoon characters with a mouse, using an MS-DOS program (these were the days before Windows!) called Dr Halo." Having survived this ordeal, "I received my first Wacom tablet towards the end of high school and it was then that I started to do small fantasy-based character commissions, and I have not looked back since."

Growing up watching movies such as Willow and The Neverending Story, Sanjana's love of the fantasy genre evolved simultaneously with her art.

"I feel truly blessed to have the opportunity to work as a professional illustrator, and I see each painting as a chance to improve my skills."

1 FERAL "Commissioned by an Australian fantasy author, who described the character as 'deathly skeletal, cruel and bestial.' My overall aim was to capture an animalistic look of desolation in her eyes."

2 SHE NEVER DOES THE DIRTY WORK "The aim of this portrait was attitude! I wanted her personality to dominate over an otherwise simple character design."

Gonzalo Rodrigo Ordoñez Arias (Genzo)

LOCATION: Chile
WEB: http://genzoman.deviantart.com
EMAIL: genzoXD@gmail.com
SOFTWARE: Photoshop CS
JOB: Graphics editor, illustrator/comic creator and art teacher

Born in Arica, Chile, Gonzalo has been interested in comics ever since he was a child. "At first I identified with the manga style," he says. "My fascination with authors like Otomo, Hagiwara and Katsura even led me to produce fanzines while still at school."

Having developed an admiration for the classical stylings of Frank Frazetta, Gonzalo went on to study graphic design and traditional painting for a couple of years before jumping into the digital world, where choices had to be made: "I started out using Corel Painter but decided to stick with Photoshop in the end."

Gonzalo became an art teacher, while still doing a healthy amount of freelance illustrations for metal bands, magazine covers, concept art and participating in Chile's Berserker Comics series.

1 BODHISATTVA "The Bodhisattva was some kind of nun, so I tried to rescue the sacred ambience of the character, using red and golden tones. In this case, like my other paintings, I always start with a dark background, because it's easier to get from darkness to light than the other way round."

2 OKENUTH An illustration for the Myths and Legends trading card game. "The editor asked me to take the idea of a magma dragon, which on the outside is made of ashes and rocks and on the inside of lava. I tried to play with the concept of the lava at the point when it's still glowing."

FANTASY ART EXHIBITION

A showcase of dazzling fantasy art from around the globe

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Fred Gambino

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